Austerity Fashion 1945-1951

rebuilding fashion cultures in post-war London

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Figure 1:

Second-hand shoes for sale at a market in the East End, by Bob Collins, 1948. Museum of London, IN37802.

Declaration of authorship

I Bethan Bide hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Bethan Bide

8 September 2017

Abstract

This thesis considers the relationship between fashion, austerity and London in the years 1945 to 1951—categorised by popular history as a period of austerity in Britain. London in the late 1940s is commonly remembered as a drab city in a state of disrepair, leading fashion historians to look instead to Paris and New York for signs of post-war energy and change. Yet, looking closer at the business of making and selling fashion in London, it becomes clear that, behind the shortages, rubble and government regulation, something was stirring.

The main empirical section of the thesis is divided into four chapters that explore different facets of London's fashionable networks. These consider how looking closely at the writing, making, selling and watching of austerity fashion can help us build a better understanding of London fashion in the late 1940s. Together, these chapters reveal that austerity was a driving force for dynamic processes of change—particularly in relation to how women's ready-to-wear fashions were made and sold in the city—and that a variety of social, economic and political conditions in post-war Britain changed the way manufacturers, retailers and consumers understood the symbolic capital of London fashion.

Placing material culture at the centre of this story and taking a 'more-than-representational' approach to research creates new historical perspectives and exposes the processes and networks concealed within the social and gender hierarchies of London fashion at this time. It redraws the map of the fashion city, making connections between the city-centre and suburb, West End stores and East End workrooms, and national government policies and local business strategies. In mapping these connections, the thesis reveals how this period of austerity, and Londoners' responses to it, formed the mould that would shape London's trajectory as a fashion city for the rest of the twentieth century.

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This project was made possible by the AHRC CDA scheme and cooperation between the Museum of London and Royal Holloway. I am particularly indebted to Melina Plottu and Tim Long at the Museum for their friendly help in the costume store, as well as the assistance of the wider History Collections team. I am grateful for the supportive environment of the Geography Department at Royal Holloway, especially Harriet Hawkins, Innes Keighren, Phil Crang and the entire Landscape Surgery group, and particularly thank Felix Driver for the stimulating conversations about research. I would also like to express gratitude to Agnès Rocamora and Christopher Breward who examined this thesis and facilitated an extremely stimulating viva. Thanks are also due to Caroline Evans and Peter Scott for their comments on parts of this work; to Edwina Ehrman, Jade Halbert, Liz Tregenza, Lorraine Smith and Lucie Whitmore for their advice; to everyone who contributed to *The Look of Austerity* conference; to the Design History Society for their generous travel grant; to all the archivists and curators who assisted me with my research, particularly to Jill Carey, Pam Parmal, Wendy Bentall and all the staff at Hackney Library and the John Lewis Partnership Heritage Centre; to Leo Mellor; and to Shaun Cole, whose continued interest in my work is much appreciated.

Finally, thanks to my friends and family for their unfailing support, particularly my parents, brilliant siblings, and grandparents, whose stories made me rethink post-war austerity. Thanks also to Cole, who remains the most patient proof-reader I know.

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Figure 2:

City bomb damage at Newgate Street, 29 September 1940. Arthur Cross. Museum of London, IN6892.

Devastated is Estuary; *devastation* remains

waste and shock. This ending is not the end,

more like the cleared spaces around St Paul's

and the gutted City after the fire-raid.

Geoffrey Hill, 'In Memorium: Gillian Rose'[1]

[1] Hill, *A Treatise of Civil Power*, 38.

Archival encounter no. 1:

82.31/2: Black wool dress with Traina-Norell label

Figure 3:

Black wool dress with Traina-Norell label. Museum of London, 82.31/2.

It is August 2015 in the Museum of London costume storeroom, and laid out in front of me on white acid-free tissue is a black wool dress about which little is recorded in the Museum's catalogue. The dress is an interesting piece of design history; it was made by Traina-Norell, an American fashion house formed in 1941 out of a partnership between New York designer Norman Norell and Anthony Traina, a wholesale clothing manufacturer.[1] Its style and maker provide a rare example of the emerging 'American Look' in the Museum of London's collection, but today I am looking for clues that might illuminate something about the circumstances in which it was worn and what it might have meant to its wearer.

Spotting signs of wear, I turn the dress over, and then inside out. Searching along each seam of its voluminous skirt, it took nearly half an hour to find what I was looking for. In a hidden section of seam allowance, there is a small rectangular hole where the fabric had been carefully cut to provide a patch used to invisibly mend a hole in the dress's underarm gusset. This exemplary mend stands out as being the best executed I have seen in the Museum's collection of 1940s garments, a period which evidences a higher proliferation and greater variety of mending techniques than either the decades before or after, indicating that austerity conditions required Londoners to prolong the life of their clothes. Mends in garments confuse our usual notions of fashion's temporality, reminding us that the date of manufacture that features in the catalogue entry does not reflect the true life (or lives) of a garment, which may have been worn and altered and kept for a much longer period of time. Traina-Norell adverts suggest this dress dates from 1948, when the exaggeratedly slim silhouette of its top half and contrastingly full skirt would have represented the very latest fashion. However, the marks of wear on the dress indicate that it was worn long beyond this date, as do differences in the quality of its various mends.

On the opposite side from the invisible mend, the corresponding underarm gusset has also been repaired. Although the dress fabric has worn in the same place under each arm, the two mends are not alike. The barely perceptible stitches of the left underarm (Figure 2(a)) contrast sharply with the considerably cruder mend on the right (Figure 2(b)), where the longer, more careless stitches show that little attempt has been made to conceal the mend into existing seams. The differences between

[1] Sholly, 'Commercial Article 06: Norman Norell', 8-9.

these mends indicate that they likely occurred at different times, and were possibly executed by different hands, one professional and one amateur. These mends indicate the changing value of the dress over time, and as such the labour bestowed upon it. The older the garment became, the less likely the owner was to mend it with care. To see such a crude example of hand-mending on an expensive garment is a reminder that a single piece of clothing can be imbued with multiple experiences and, more broadly, a reminder of the multiple, and sometimes contradictory, stories a single object has to tell.

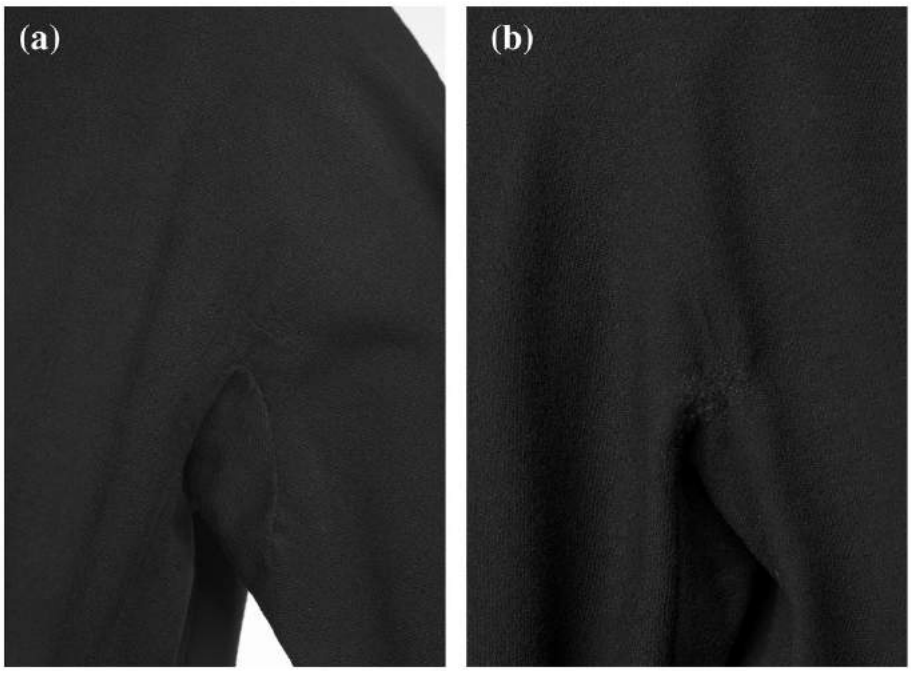

Figure 4(a-b):

Under-arm mends on black wool dress with Traina-Norell label. Museum of London, 82.31/2.

Figure 5:

Rhona Roy dress advert. *Draper's Record*, 25 October 1947, 38.

One:

Introduction

Figure 6:

Damage to buildings in Watling Street (near Queen Victoria Street), caused by a high-explosive bomb at 2:10 a.m., 10 September 1940. Arthur Cross. Museum of London, IN6779.

In an old photograph of a London office building, a dark-coloured coat hangs from a hook in an alcove next to a fireplace (figure 6a). It is hardly an unusual place to find a coat, except that the room in question no longer has a floor or a ceiling, and is missing a further three of its walls. The coat is covered in dust, presumably thrown up by the building's violent collapse, and is now uncannily exposed to the elements, waiting for an owner who may never return. Moving through the fresh rubble the morning after an air raid, photographer Arthur Cross and his assistant Fred Tibbs captured this remarkable snapshot at one of the darkest points of the London blitz. Decades later, the juxtaposition of the coat—an object representing the quiet ordinariness of everyday life—against the skeletal remains of the building provides a poignant reminder of the sudden and extraordinary changes experienced by London and Londoners during the Second World War.

Figure 6(a):

Detail showing coat in photograph of damage to buildings in Watling Street. Arthur Cross. Museum of London, IN6779.

Over 50 per cent. of the buildings within Greater London were damaged by aerial bombardment between 1940-1945.[1] The war made alien landscapes of once familiar streets. It vanished homes and workplaces overnight, without warning. It upset domestic routines and it rewrote social conventions.[2] This widespread destruction severely impacted the city's fashion industry, destroying stock, machinery, factories, warehouses, and retailers.[3] As a consequence, the war seriously and suddenly disrupted the complex web of fashionable networks that operated in (and, at times, around) London. Further, it distorted the familiar cycles of fashion, slowing the pace of fashionable change and breaking learned consumption habits.[4] Alongside rationing, between 1942 and 1946 the government controlled the design of clothing through the Making of Civilian Clothing (Restrictions) orders (more commonly known as austerity design restrictions), representing the greatest public intrusion into the private realm of dressing since the days of sumptuary laws.[5] This required London's inhabitants to reimagine their relationships to clothes.[6]

Although the arrival of peace in Europe on 8 May 1945 was met with celebrations, it did not mark a return to normality but the start of a new set of struggles for a heavily indebted nation, and particularly for its badly damaged capital city. This thesis investigates how the decisions made about what to rebuild, promote, discard and modernise in the wake of the changes wrought by the Second World War reshaped London fashion with profound and long-term consequences. Looking at the period between the end of the war in 1945 and the general election of 1951, categorised in popular history as a time of austerity in Britain, it pieces together archival remnants in order to build a better understanding of how fashion operated and what it meant in the immediate post-war city.

What it finds calls into question some of the well-known tropes about the relationship between austerity, fashion and London. The distinctive archival

[1] Mellor, *Reading the Ruins*, 1. More specific figures held by the London Metropolitan Archive reveal that 73,073 buildings in the London Regional Area were totally demolished, with a further 43,410 damaged beyond repair. Ward, *Bomb Damage Maps*, 33.
[2] See Calder, *The Myth of the Blitz*; Ziegler, *London at War*.
[3] A sense of the scale of damage can be glimpsed in the level of compensation the garment industry received under the War Damage commodity (trader's stocks) and business (plant, machinery and business equipment) schemes. *Draper's Record.* 5 January 1946, 50.
[4] As Elizabeth Wilson has noted, modernity has a rhythm that can be experienced through the cycles of fashion, providing a reassuring measure by which we live our lives. Wilson, 'Fashion and Modernity', 9.
[5] Howell, *Wartime Fashion*, 99-108.
[6] Bide, *The Shattering and Reinvention of the Fashionable Self*.

approach that underpins this work enables it to break down existing historical orthodoxies that describe the stasis of post-war London fashion when compared to Paris or New York.[7] By placing material culture at the centre of this story, the thesis reveals how austerity was a driving force for dynamic processes of change and, in particular, how the economics and government policies of post-war Britain had long-term consequences on the ways London retailers sold fashions and how clothes were designed and made in the city.

This focus on materiality was made possible by the AHRC Collaborative Doctoral Award that funded this project in conjunction with the Museum of London. This provided me with open access to the Museum's fashion collections and enabled me to develop a strong specialist knowledge of the materiality of 1940s fashions, foregrounding everyday experiences of fashion in London through close looking at the details of how objects were designed, made and used. Taking the collection as a starting point left me free to approach a wide range of governmental, municipal and commercial archives and bring together disparate fragments of material that informed my understanding of items from the Museum's collections. This model of archival research has enabled the thesis to take an inter-disciplinary approach, cross-referencing sources related to the fields of design, economic and business histories. Examining these disparate sources side-by-side with extant garments exposes the processes and networks concealed within the social and gender hierarchies of London fashion at this time. It also opens up new historical geographies of the fashion city, making connections between the city centre and suburb, West End stores and East End workrooms, and national government policies and local business strategies. In mapping these connections, the thesis reveals how this period of 'austerity' formed the mold that would shape London's trajectory as a fashion city for the rest of the twentieth century.

[7] It is common for histories of 1940s fashion to discuss the period of 1940 to 1945 in relation to British fashion changes, before moving across the sea to Paris and New York when discussing developments between 1945 and 1950.

London, fashion and austerity

London's long and close relationship to fashion has been well documented, from the eighteenth century rise of the West End as a place to obtain fashionable goods to its current status as a global fashion capital.[8] The city's fashion industry has survived, and even thrived, by constantly adapting to changing conditions over this period, and it underwent several notable developments in the first half of the twentieth century. The industry became more formalised in the years following the First World War, seeing a decline in London's population of outworkers and a rise in the number of small factories and organised labour.[9] New high-end wholesale bespoke and ready-to-wear firms grew as the city adapted to changing patterns of clothing manufacture. Many of these firms were run by first- and second-generation Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe, continuing the long-running cycle of integration into London life through the garment industry.[10] In the 1930s, the high-end of the industry saw increasing attempts to coordinate the promotion of women's fashion both at home and internationally, particularly in the formation of industry groups including the British Colour Council and the Fashion Group of Great Britain.[11] The way the city sold fashion also changed in the inter-war years; from the consumer's perspective, shoppers would have taken note as the city's large department stores began to run increasingly spectacular promotions for their fashionable goods, and a growing readership for fashion publications such as British *Vogue* further cemented the city's status as a shopping destination.[12]

Census records give a sense of the importance of fashion to London's economy in the 1930s. Comparing the figures from 1931 and 1951 provides a measure of the impact of the Second World War on the industry, reflecting a widespread decline in the number of people employed in making and retailing clothes during this period.[13] The blitz wiped out a large number of factories, shops and offices. It even disrupted the training of garment workers, with students from Barrett Street Trade School

[8] Styles, *The dress of the people,* 167-178; Breward, *Fashioning London,* 28-35; O'Byrne, *Style City,* 230-245.
[9] Hunter and Stewart, *The Needle is Threaded,* 151.
[10] The Museum of London holds a number of garments from such firms in their collections. See, for example Museum of London 45.3/2a, a 'Koupy' coat made by Charles 'Chas' Kuperstein and Museum of London 45.15, a Jersey de Luxe coat from Messers W. and O. Marcus Ltd.
[11] Ehrman, 'Supporting Couture, 34; Jones, 'The Most Charming Attempt to Ally Art & Industry'.
[12] Edwards, *Making the West End Modern*.
[13] See Table 1, page 114 of this thesis.

(later to become part of the London College of Fashion) forced to move between various workrooms hired from firms such as Debenhams after their West End building was hit.[14] Garment-making in London would never again return to its pre-war levels.[15] In addition to these trends, the consumer experience was severely disrupted as bomb-damaged fashion departments closed, window displays were boarded up and stock became increasingly scarce.[16] Yet, in spite of the scale of damage and disruption, a number of historians argue that the 1940s was a pivotal moment in the fortunes of London fashion. Jonathan Walford has argued that the combination of Paris's weakened position as a result of wartime occupation and the organisation of London's high-end designers under the newly formed Incorporated Society of London Fashion Designers (or IncSoc) allowed London to gain increased status as an internationally important fashion city, and Robert O'Byrne has traced a direct trajectory from the formation of IncSoc to the inauguration of London Fashion Week in 1983 and London's ascendance as a world fashion capital.[17]

To understand the contradiction between these two versions of London fashion in the 1940s—to reconcile on the one hand, the decline of the city as a centre of fashionable making and, on the other, its rise as a symbolic fashion city—we must recognise that the sum of 'London fashion' is more than its component parts, more than the mechanics of designing, making, and selling. It is a complex network of interrelated people, places, things and institutions that both shape and are shaped by broader social and cultural trends, and it is the stories told about the connections between these.[18] Attempting to 'map' these vast geographies of London fashion has proved an irresistible challenge to cultural and fashion historians. This thesis draws particularly on the various ways Alistair O'Neill and Christopher Breward have conceptualised notions of place in their studies of London fashion, using detailed analysis of how fashionable networks operated in small areas of the city—and how

[14] London College of Fashion Archives. Prospectus for Barrett Street Trade School, 1945-1946.
[15] The *Census of Production* records for the 1950s and beyond show a decline in both the number of people and firms manufacturing clothes in London.
[16] Bide, 'Make Do and Spend', 4.
[17] Walford, *Forties Fashion,* 53; O'Byrne, *Style City*, 11-13.
[18] The networks and flows of London fashion were the subject of a research project entitled 'Shopping Routes: Networks of Fashion Consumption in London's West End 1945-1979', directed by Christopher Breward and David Gilbert between 2003 and 2006.

these changed over time—to provide glimpses of fashion's shifting 'role in the lives of Londoners'.[19]

The focus of this thesis is also informed by recent calls for fashion studies to bridge the divide between fashion design and representation, and the economics of fashion systems.[20] Recognising that the fashion city 'is both a material and a discursive reality', this thesis aims to make new connections between the production, consumption and representation of clothes.[21] As a result, it builds upon studies that have used the details of individual extant objects to narrate the larger story of the fashion city, in particular Rebecca Arnold's work on American sportswear and the publication that accompanied the Museum of London's 2004 exhibition *The London Look: Fashion from Street to Catwalk*.[22] None of these works claim to offer authoritative histories or definitions of London fashion. Instead, they show us new ways of looking at the city's networks of fashion.

While much has been written about the couture designers who made up IncSoc and the London Model House Group (the trade body set up to represent the city's high-end ready-to-wear makers), the stories of smaller bespoke and ready-to-wear makers and the networks that sustained them remain under-researched.[23] Following in the footsteps of Nancy Green's *Ready-to-Wear and Ready-to-Work,* which credited the importance of a marginalised labour force comprised primarily of women and immigrants in building the success of Paris and New York's fashion industries, and inspired by Christine Boydell's study of Horrockses Fashions, this thesis looks again at the interconnected processes that made, marketed and sold London fashion.[24] It does so with the aim of crediting the importance of the unacknowledged individuals whose skills and labour supported the reputations of well-known designers and fashion brands. It also asks how these processes changed during the immediate post-war years, and it considers the extent to which both the

[19] Breward, *Fashioning London,* 11; O'Neill, *London—after a fashion*. See also Shaun Cole's work on Carnaby Street and Beatrice Behlen's research into fashionable clusters in Hanover Square.
[20] Gilbert, 'The Looks of Austerity'.
[21] Rocamora, *Fashioning the city,* XIV.
[22] Arnold, *The American Look*; Breward, Ehrman and Evans, *The London Look.*
[23] For examples of research into couture and high-end fashions in the 1940s, see de la Haye and Ehrman, *London Couture*; Pick, *Be Dazzled!*; Tregenza, *London before it swung.*
[24] Boydell, *Horrockses Fashions*; Green, *Ready-to-Wear and Ready-to-Work.*

official government policies and social constructions of austerity reshaped London as a fashion city.

The immediate post-war period provides a rich source for considering the geographies of fashion networks because the war acted as such a strong catalyst for change in London and because the precise nature of those changes is often complex. Discussions of what type of modern fashion city should be built from London's rubble were frequently contradictory.[25] Although there was much talk of new beginnings in the immediate post-war years, the pace of reconstruction was frustratingly slow and there was little appetite for radical change on either an individual or institutional level.[26] While some believed that society really was on the cusp of something different, and theorised that the new-found equality of post-war Britain would leave no role for fashionable dress and its function as a measure of social distinction, in reality public interest in notions of 'community' diminished rapidly after the war.[27] Mass Observation concluded that, compared to the war years, a 'striking' number of people were thinking predominantly in terms of their own wellbeing when considering what kind of post-war world should be built.[28] Perhaps this should not come as a surprise considering the very real difficulties of life in post-war London. Acute shortages of building stock forced up both residential and business rents, and many Londoners' found themselves homeless.[29] A combination of rising taxes and inflation after the war resulted in materially diminished circumstances, with one government report concluding that over 70 per cent. of those surveyed found their finances more squeezed in 1948 than a year earlier.[30] Even previously materially wealthy Londoners were forced to come to terms with the fact that their post-war wardrobes would no-longer contain the once-familiar labels of Schiaparelli or Chanel, as import duty and restrictions put Parisian couture even further out of reach.[31]

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[25] For a general discussion of the contradictory nature of post-war British modernity, see Conekin, Mort and Waters, 'Moments of Modernity: Introduction', 2-10.
[26] This is exemplified by Bronwen Edwards's study of the opposing visions for the West End held by planner Patrick Abercrombie and the retailers and fashion houses who operated in the area and cherished its 'historic framework'. Edwards, 'Shaping the Fashion City', 159.
[27] Bell, *On Human Finery*, 128.
[28] Cowan, 'The People's Peace', 79.
[29] Cooper, 'Snoek Piquante', 44.
[30] Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Austerity in Britain*, 85.
[31] The protagonist of Verily Anderson's novel *Our Square* (1957) uses the example of a Schiaparelli dress as a symbol of her adjustment to the changed social reality of post-war life. Anderson, *Our Square*, 141.

Without denying the reality of these hardships, this thesis raises questions about the ridged boundaries that characterise the period between 1945 and 1951 as a time of 'austerity' in British fashion. 1945 is commonly taken as the start date for histories of 'modern' Britain, with the Second World War considered to mark a turning point in the political, social and cultural history of the nation.[32] However, marking the endpoint of austerity at 1951 seems to have been, although repeated, a more arbitrary boundary. Although numerous events are considered to bookmark the end of austerity, from the relaxing of rationing and controls to the Festival of Britain, the main factor that unifies these six years is the rule of Clement Attlee's Labour government. It is the specific impact of this government's socialist policies on post-war society that forms the basis of perhaps the first canonical study of this period of austerity, Philip French and Michael Sisson's book of collected essays *Age of Austerity 1945-1951*, published in 1963. French and Sissons concluded that this period of recent history was categorised by both shortages and frustrated idealism, and that 1951's Festival of Britain marked its end by providing a glimpse of hope for an easier future.[33] The structure of this book and its narratives of progress, struggle and desire, and the bleakness of life in Britain in the late 1940s, have proved hugely influential historical tropes that are repeated in Peter Hennessey's *Never Again: Britain 1945-1951* and David Kynaston's *Austerity Britain 1945-51*, the latter of which has become something of a definitive popular account of post-war austerity.

While the impressive breadth of sources in both Hennessey and Kynaston's social histories makes for compelling reading, other historians have challenged the extent to which the categorisation of the 1940s as a time of austerity and the 1950s as a time of prosperity hold up to scrutiny, suggesting that this divide is largely the result of political storytelling. Certainly, Conservative Party propaganda during the early 1950s celebrated their return to power as the end of austerity and a return to affluence, and it is this narrative that recurs in broad historical accounts that connect official government policies of austerity to a broader national mood created by the shortages and restrictions of those policies.[34]

[32] See Marwick, *British Society Since 1945*; Bartlett, *The History of Postwar Britain*; Marr, *History of Modern Britain*; Humphries and Weightman; *The Making of Modern London*.
[33] Frayn, 'Festival', 330.
[34] Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Austerity in Britain,* 203.

These narratives have politicised the term 'austerity' in a way that has changed its contemporary meaning in relation to fashion. Derived from the Latin for 'severe', austerity had been used in Britain as a description of plainness and simplicity in dress since at least the eighteenth century, often with puritanical moral connotations.[35] This morality of self-denial is certainly present in the way the coalition government of the Second World War discussed austerity regulations for clothing, and language that associated self-restraint with goodness had clear advantages to a government trying to persuade a nation to consume less. The new Labour government elected in 1945 continued to draw on these associations of austerity in an attempt to gain support for policies that centred around 'downgrading the legitimacy of consumption', and the political discourse that ensued cemented the connections between austerity, drabness and everyday struggles for generations to come.[36]

It is as a result of this discourse that fashion has long provided a symbolic framework for historians to consider how Britain negotiated the material hardships and social change of the immediate post-war period, with fashion used to represent the opposing draws of personal material gratification and self-sacrifice in the interest of the nation. This can be traced back to the different ways that both Labour and the Conservatives used the relationship between fashion and austerity as metaphor for their different social visions in the late 1940s, in spite of the fact that the original wartime 'austerity' restrictions on the design and decoration of clothing ended by the spring of 1946. This foregrounding of fashion formed part of a wider targeting of women, and especially housewives, by the Conservative Party's anti-austerity message, as a result of which austerity discourse both in the 1940s and in subsequent analogies to this time commonly take a feminine subject position.[37] Recent works by several female historians have highlighted the 'reactionary and conservative' gender politics of austerity while revealing its disproportionate negative impact on women, who were more directly tasked with finding solutions to keep households going through periods characterised by shortages and inflation.[38]

[35] Berry, 'The Pleasures of Austerity', 264.
[36] Tomlinson, 'Marshall Aid and the Shortage Economy', 139.
[37] Bramall, *The Cultural Politics of Austerity*, 111.
[38] Bramall, *The Cultural Politics of Austerity*, 112. See also Noakes, *War and the British*, 165; Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Austerity in Britain*, 2.

This close relationship between women and the social construction of austerity is mirrored in the often equally reactionary and conservative discussions of post-war fashion trends. The language widely used to describe the defining fashion moment of the decade, the New Look, is imbued with a regressive ideal of 'femininity' and the man behind it, Christian Dior, is frequently credited as 'liberating' women from the austerity styles.[39] In fact, the vast majority of literature on women's fashion in the 1940s has a noticeably male viewpoint, being dominated by studies of male fashion designers and industry bodies largely comprised of men. While it has been heartening to note the field of fashion studies beginning to address the lack of research into men's experiences of fashion in recent years, it is important to remember how marginalised the histories of female garment workers and everyday experiences of clothes remain, and how necessary it is to uncover these stories in order to write women back into their own histories.

Materiality, archives and disruptive museum objects

The research for this thesis sought out Londoners' everyday experiences of making, buying and wearing fashion by looking closely at fragments of the past. In this, the thesis demonstrates a shared interest with many of the writers, artists and photographers operating in the city in the immediate aftermath of the war, whose work shows a recurring desire to scrabble around in the ruins. Against a grand backdrop of shiny civil plans and grand manifestos for a better future, they pieced together the fragments left behind by wartime destruction in order to understand what had been lost in London and to explore what was starting to grow in its place.[40] Seventy years on, the material nature of the changes they experienced can be glimpsed in the remnants that survive, scattered across museums, archives and shoeboxes in garden sheds.[41] Inspired by the diversity of the Museum of London's fashion collections and the range of different 'austerity' experiences they seemed to contain, this thesis draws on these disparate archival fragments in order to make sense of the Museum's collection by reconnecting it to materials from the fashionable networks its pieces once belonged to.

[39] McDowell, *Forties Fashion and the New Look,* 179.
[40] Macaulay, *The World My Wilderness*, 60; Mellor, *Reading the Ruins*, 195.
[41] A large part of the Bentalls archive is indeed currently housed in a garden shed and, of course, remnants of this period remain, both cherished and forgotten, throughout the city.

Working with the Museum of London brought me into sustained proximity with material objects in a way that encouraged me to consider how looking closely at the material details of clothes—seeing how they have been made and experienced—can disrupt historical orthodoxies. London's vastness, both in its geography and its socio-economic variety, demands close looking rather than broad historical generalisations. By drawing out the makers and consumers whose hands had shaped the garments but whose stories have been overlooked and forgotten, close looking provides a means of unpicking some of the mythologies told about austerity fashion. More than this, looking closely at a variety of archival materials, and then making connections between these fragment of knowledge, changes the perspective of fashion—and city—histories.

Archival fragments show that Londoners had varied and even contradictory experiences of austerity in relation to fashion, repeatedly refuting simple narratives.[42] An image of a London boot repairer from 1946 (figure 7) might at first glance seem to provide evidence of a culture of making do, but the sling back snakeskin-effect shoe to which he tends suggests a certain glamour and desire to dress for pleasure over practicality. Similarly, Molly Moss's 1950 London Transport poster 'Out and About in London' (figure 8) shows the diversity of ways in which austerity permeated London fashions. Within her crowd of busy shoppers circling a brightly lit Piccadilly Circus, there are a mixture of practical fleece-lined boots, headscarves and coats designed under austerity regulations walking amongst new-look style flared coats and elaborate hats. Even in this fictional scene, the economic relativity of austerity is apparent in the differences in dress between the shoppers loaded down with parcels, and those with more modest shopping.

Looking closely at these archival fragments exposes the need to look again at the story of austerity fashion in London because it reveals the tensions between the key objects of official histories and archival objects, which reveal the messier details of individual lives. This is particularly apparent in the tensions between extant garments and the historical orthodoxies of British fashion history, which present the

[42] This mirrors Elizabeth Wilson's wider understanding that women's relationships with fashion, and how they use it to negotiate urban experiences, are complex. Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams*.

Figure 7:

'William Hills, boot repairer, Camden'. Henry Grant, 1946. Museum of London, HG1182/22.

1940s though three well-established tropes: Utility and government control, Make Do and Mend, and the New Look and post-war recovery.[43] Running through each of these is an often under-acknowledged assumption that austerity fashion developed as a result of a top-down power structure in which the acts of a benevolent, male-dominated government impacted upon British women through rationing and design regulations.[44] These narratives, however, overlook individual experiences in favour of authoritative public histories, and they ignore theories exploring how fashionable experiences occur within a network of social and cultural influences.[45]

[43] See Wood, *We Wore What We'd Got*; McDowell, *Forties Fashion*; Reynolds *The 40s and 50s*; Walford, *Forties Fashion*; Howell, *Wartime Fashion*; Summers, *Fashion on the Ration.*

[44] Laver, *A Concise History of Costume*, 252-259; Sladen, *The Conscription of Fashion*; Brown, *CC41 Utility Clothing.*

[45] For accounts questioning this top-down approach, see Partington, 'Popular Fashion', 145-146; Mort, 'Social and Symbolic Fathers', 383; Banim, Green and Guy, 'Introduction', 1-17; Woodward, *Why Women Wear What They Wear.*

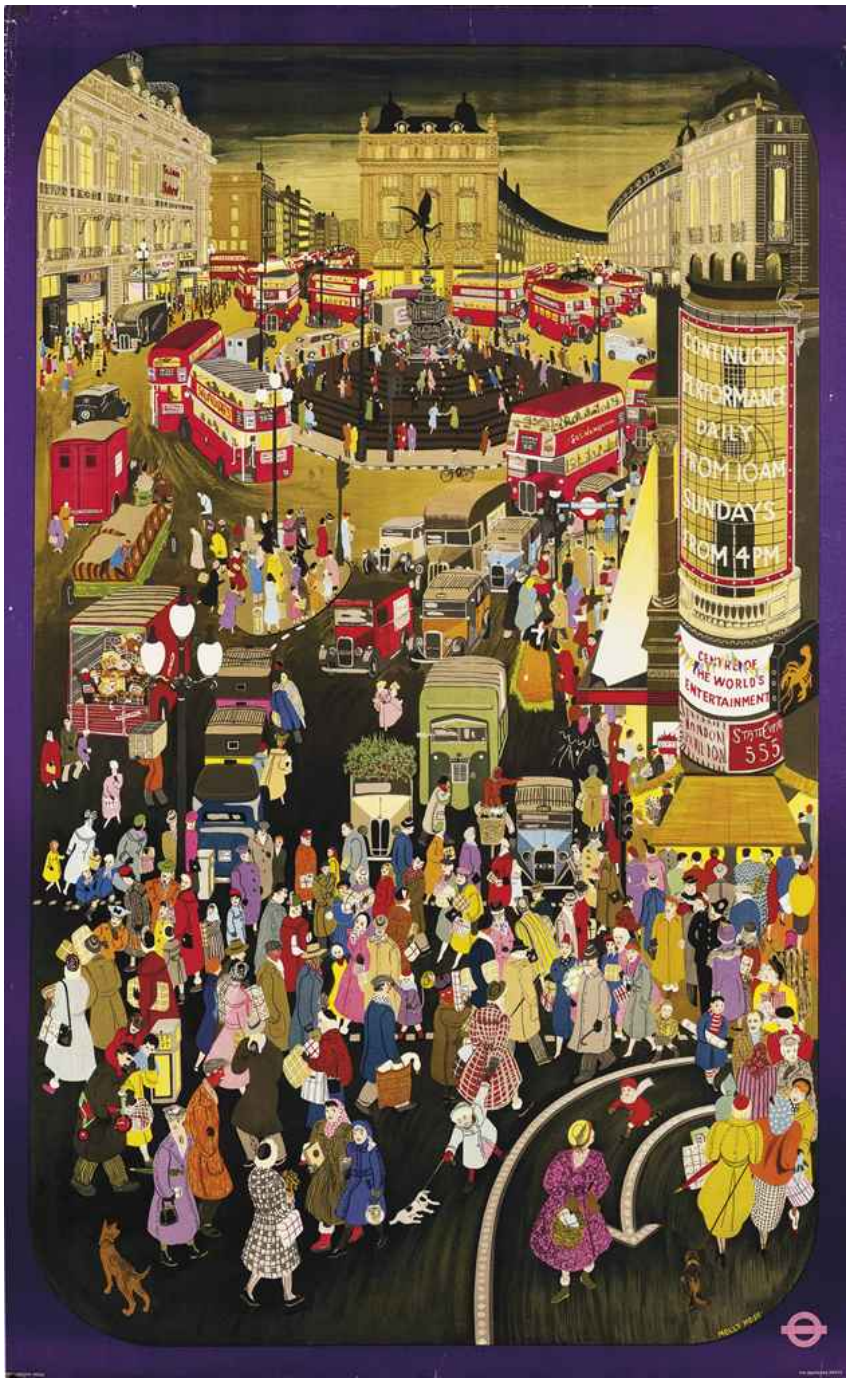

Figure 8:

'Out and About in London', Molly Moss, 1950. London Transport Museum, 1983/4/6367.

Accounts of how official regulations impacted women too often ignore the fact that austerity experiences were filtered through individual circumstances. In doing so, these accounts remove the power of fashion objects to tell 'history from below'.[46]

These particularly prescriptive orthodoxies of austerity are also present in many museums. Attempts to impose such narratives on to chronological fashion displays commonly distill museum collections into two oppositional groups of garments in a display case: simple and austere pieces of Utility, contrasted with the full-skirted New Look. Examples of these types of display range from museums with specialist fashion collections, such as London's Victoria and Albert Museum, to smaller museums of place. Sale prices of such exemplary pieces indicate that this narrative is growing rather than waning in popularity—the record breaking £1,700 raised by a 'typical' Utility suit sold through Kerry Taylor Auctions in October 2015, nearly ten times its estimate, was primarily driven by a bidding war between museums.

But fashion objects themselves can push back against these orthodoxies by speaking of individual experiences, as was demonstrated by the Imperial War Museum's 2015 exhibition 'Fashion on the Ration: 1940s Street Style'. Here, many of the objects on display themselves disrupted the familiar austerity narrative that was otherwise broadly adhered to by the exhibition's structure. The darned overalls, worn thin with the toil of manual labour; the playful underwear set, a lustful gift from a boyfriend; the communal hope of a wedding dress, lent out twelve times—these garments oozed messy, embodied experiences and reminded visitors that the British population was as diverse and contrary as ever during the 1940s, in spite of clothing controls.

The power of close looking is elaborated upon further in chapter two—the methodological section of this thesis. This discusses how examining the small material details of clothes whilst working in the Museum of London's fashion collections encouraged this project to look at a broader range of archival sources and to engage with them in a different way. By foregrounding the significance of material details that reveal the routines and embodied experiences of Londoners at this time, getting close to clothes uncovers the importance of the cumulative actions

[46] Thompson, 'History from Below, 279-80.

of individuals in shaping the meanings of London fashion in the immediate post-war period.[47] The methodology explains how, in order to explore a more complete account of the personal contributions that Londoners made to the material and symbolic fashion city further, this project draws on more-than-representational research approaches in the way it gathers together disparate materials and incomplete records—from clothing to newspapers and business archives—and pieces them together with the aim of finding evidence of material experiences of fashion.[48] In particular, it considers how representational sources such as photographs and film can be used alongside material sources to offer evidence of the lived experiences of austerity fashion cultures.

The disruptive power of material fashion objects is revisited throughout this thesis and foregrounded in a series of brief 'archival encounters', interwoven between the chapters. These moments of close looking highlight objects from the Museum of London's fashion collections that might usually be overlooked by researchers because little is known about them or because they do not comfortably fit existing historical orthodoxies. Taking time to consider the different ways these pieces have been worn and experienced by individual bodies provides a disruptive invitation to look again at some of our assumptions about austerity. These archival encounters invite the reader to participate collaboratively in the research process and contribute to the findings of the thesis by asking how these objects might be 'read' in multiple ways that reveal the diverse, and even divergent, nature of experiences of austerity fashion in the city. Perhaps more importantly, they also serve as reminders of the inevitably partial nature of this study, and the many stories still to be told about austerity fashion in post-war London.

[47] Lorimer, 'Cultural Geography', 84.
[48] This project borrows here from Raymond William's idea that a 'structure of feeling' is present in the cultural outputs of a particular time and place. Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 128-135.

Writing, making, selling and watching austerity fashion

The main empirical section of the thesis is divided into four chapters that explore different facets of London's fashionable networks. These consider how looking closely at the writing, making, selling and watching of austerity fashion can help us build a better understanding of the processes of London fashion in the late 1940s. Each of these chapters starts in a different part of the city's bombed ruins, revealing the diversity of fashionable places and perspectives that were connected by the impact of war and post-war austerity. The first of these, chapter three, turns to the New Look—perhaps the best-known trend of the decade—to discuss how austerity fashion was written in London. It approaches this well-trodden narrative through close analysis of coverage in London press sources in order to investigate the reality of the New Look's reception by the public and its impact in London. Looking closely at these written sources reveals how fashion mythologies can be deconstructed by considering the details of words and images in fashion media. By taking a more geographically specific approach to historical sources, the chapter demonstrates the local influences that shaped how this international trend was produced and consumed in London; however, in doing so, it also shows what cannot be understood about London fashion from press sources alone, highlighting the importance of incorporating materiality into this study of austerity in order to understand how the interconnected processes of London fashion were reshaped during this period.

Recognising that the social histories of fashion are as much about fashioning material objects as they are crafting symbolic meaning, chapter four takes a material turn towards objects from museum fashion collections.[49] This chapter's interest in uncovering the processes by which objects were made is informed by a recent flurry of interest in garment-making as a way of telling geographical narratives of labour and power structures in commodity chains.[50] It also builds on work interested in collapsing distinctions between crafting and manufacture, considering how literatures of crafting and creativity can be applied more broadly to

[49] Green, *Ready-to-Wear and Ready-to-Work.* David Gilbert also discusses how the symbolic status of fashion cities is supported by skilled makers. Gilbert, 'From Paris to Shanghai', 27.
[50] See Hall and Jayne, 'Make, mend and befriend', building on McRobbie, *British Fashion Design*; Fletcher, 'Slow fashion'; Pollard, 'Gendering Capital'.

cultures of fashionable making.[51] The chapter looks closely at extant garments to describe how the lingering impact of the war and government austerity policies reshaped the processes and geographies of making clothes in London. In particular, it draws attention to the way economic circumstances shaped London fashion design and foregrounds the impact of austerity conditions, which accelerated the growth of mass-market ready-to-wear, on re-drawing the map of London garment manufacturing.

Chapter five moves from production to consumption, recognising that the new ways of making clothes detailed in chapter four required new approaches to selling fashion. Due to the ephemeral nature of retail displays and promotional activities, studying the materiality of fashion retailing at this time necessitates looking beyond extant objects to find sources such as photographs that indicate how shoppers interacted with the retail space. By bringing together fragments from various retail and business archives, this chapter explains how the increased uptake of ready-to-wear fashion, combined with austerity limitations, supported the development of—and, in a way, required—a more accessible type of retail spectacle than had been seen during the 1930s. It focuses on the activities of squeezed department stores in order to consider how austerity acted as a catalyst for innovations in the way display and promotion were used to sell fashion goods, with particular consideration of the rise of self-service selling and the emergence of youth fashions. This chapter makes connections between London's diminished status as a centre for fashionable making and an increasing need for retailers to promote themselves in relation to a symbolic fashion city, but it also considers how the upheaval of the decade disrupted the geographical hierarchies of fashion retail in London. By dividing the chapter geographically into two parts, the first a case study of the West End and the second a study of Bentalls, a department store on the fringes of South-West London, it invites further consideration of the contributions made by London's suburbs to its status as a fashion city.

When comparing personal accounts of fashionable experiences against business records, a clear gap emerges between the dynamic innovations apparent in the processes of making and selling London fashions and the everyday experiences of

[51] Gibson, 'Material Inheritances'.

frustration and the limitations remembered by the city's fashionable consumers during this period. This gap serves as a reminder that the fashion city is comprised of many different narratives. Chapter six explores this relationship between fact, fiction and fashionable storytelling by considering how Londoners consumed austerity fashions by watching them on-screen. It examines the role of cinematic costumes in in a series of London-based films produced by Ealing Studios between 1947 and 1951, looking closely at the ways these costumes are shot and considering how the materiality of garments on-screen communicated different emotional responses to austerity and post-war change. The films produced by Ealing Studios during this period have a central place in the popular imagery of austerity in London and are widely discussed by film and cultural historians, making them an important representational source about austerity fashion. By taking a more-than-representational approach to these films, this chapter destabilises much of the austerity symbolism Ealing's post-war films are known for. Specifically, it achieves this by theorising about how audiences may have understood the material details of costumes through their own embodied experiences of wearing clothes and, in turn, how these films shaped audiences' understanding of the relationship between fashion, austerity and the city. This approach reveals how unpicking the detailed embodied meaning of clothes on screen provides a means to disrupt the cultural nostalgia for post-war austerity that these enduringly popular films feed.

The thesis concludes by considering what has been found by looking beyond the historical tropes of rationing, design regulations and shortages to see the more fundamental changes austerity caused to the meaning and make-up of London fashion. It presents a new understanding of the development of the post-war fashion city, centred around the rapid growth of mass-market, branded ready-to-wear, and explains how this was connected to the increasing importance of symbolism for London fashion. By exposing the breadth and complexity of the fashionable networks that operated in the city, it redraws London's fashionable geographies to include the important contributions that activities in unfashionable suburbs made to reconstructing fashion cultures in the aftermath of the war. Most importantly, it notes how the research methodologies of this project reveal the need to reconsider the importance of the immediate post-war years as a time when

foundations were laid for the growing presence of London fashion on an international stage in future decades.

The conclusion further considers the effect of taking a more-than-representational approach to fashion history, showing how this can expose hidden power structures in the city and make space to bring together conflicting subjective accounts with the stories of forgotten individuals in order to create a more comprehensive understanding of the multiple experiences of fashion in austerity London. The ways in which this thesis approaches archival materials and museum objects helps us see how austerity continues to shape our cultural understanding of fashion today and, as a result, the thesis ends by considering how the findings of this research could be used to rethink how austerity fashion is displayed in museums in order to cultivate more diverse understandings of the cultural meanings of austerity.

Figure 9:

Hutchings shoes advert, featuring a backdrop of St Paul's Cathedral. *Harper's Bazaar*, March 1946, 10.

Archival encounter no. 2:

66.12/3: Orange trousers in velvet corduroy c. 1945-1950. Label reads ‘D. H. Evans London W1’

Figure 10:

Orange trousers in velvet corduroy. Museum of London, 66.12/3.

It is April 2015, and I am peering through a hand lens at the discoloured and frayed hems of a pair of orange trousers. I am trying to identify whether the dark marks are caused by soil or soot, seeking some clue as to the kinds of places where these trousers were worn in the hope it will help me understand more about what they meant to the wearer. The evidence suggests that they were worn extensively in an urban environment. The fabric at the back of the hems has frayed in an arc about the heel, indicative of the wearer's stride, and what remains of the hems is caked in dark traces of inorganic dirt, likely gathered from repeated contact with dusty London pavements (figure 5). Although no record remains of where exactly these trousers were worn, their heavy marks of wear indicate that they probably travelled many miles on the city's bomb-damaged streets.

The fabric and construction of these trousers provide further clues as to why they received so much wear. Worn clothes often reveal how a body has resisted the restrictive construction of a garment through signs such as pulled threads and loose stitching at seams, which indicate they once fitted a body uncomfortably tightly. In contrast, these trousers hint that they were worn by a body that found comfort and freedom in their fabric and cut. The corduroy, which is still remarkably soft, creates an accommodating structure that moves with, rather than against, the body. It is rubbed thin at the knees and hips where it has been shaped by the wearer's limbs over a long period of use.

But the trousers are also clearly a statement of style and identity, not just practicality. These unusually brightly coloured trousers were purchased from mid-market Oxford Street department store D. H. Evans, which suggests that they were not a high-value item and reminds us that comfortable, ready-to-wear fashions also allowed individuals to make dramatic fashion statements. The matted dirt still visible on the hems root the garment in the post-war landscape. Because of this, their vivid orange colour challenges the prevailing image of austerity London as a city inhabited by shabby figures in worn shades of grey.[1] Clothes are a stitched medium through which we make sense of our surroundings; by repeatedly wearing these trousers in a public setting, it is likely that their wearer not only brought colour to her own life, but

[1] Kynaston, *Austerity Britain*, 191.

changed the city's aesthetics for those who passed her on the pavement or glimpsed an unexpected flash of orange out of a bus window.

Figure 11:

Detail of trouser hems. Museum of London, 66.12/3.

Figure 12:

Detail of trouser label, reading D.H.Evans London.W.1. Museum of London, 66.12/3.

Figure 13:

Slimma slacks advert. *Harper's Bazaar*, January-February 1946, 85.

Two:

Methodology

Figure 14:

Detail of a black silk jacket embroidered with glass beads, part of a cocktail suit. Made by Peggy Lewis & Co. in 1949. Museum of London, 2002.155/2a.

Amid the uniform rows of rolling stacks in the Museum storeroom, I unzip a white Tyvek garment bag. The dress revealed on the hanger beneath is, in many ways, unremarkable. It looks similar to many others in the collection. There is nothing unusual about the fabric or the cut. Made in 1948, its full skirt and colourful stripes make it a typical example of a cotton sundress from this period, one of many such dresses mass-produced by long-forgotten London factory workers. But turn it inside out and look at the seams. Note the neatness of the stitching and the slightly wonky hand-finishing in hard-to-reach corners. See where the seam meanders slightly near the hem—a momentary lapse of concentration from the machinist, but not a big enough mistake to unpick and redo. Not when you are being paid by the garment.

We encounter clothes on a daily basis, but we rarely pause to really look at them and consider what they can tell us about the people who made, sold and wore them. This is a shame, as close study of the materiality of everyday fashion objects has the potential to inform, disrupt and broaden the familiar narratives we tell about the past.[1] Moreover, learning to identify material evidence of fashion processes in extant garments also encourages us to look at other sources differently—in particular, to consider how materiality is manifested in representational sources such as photographs and films.

This methodological chapter explains how getting close to clothes whilst working embedded in the materiality of the Museum of London's fashion collections changed the way this project approached archival research. It explains how the materiality of the Museum's collections revealed the importance of the actions and experiences of individual Londoners in shaping the wider fashion city in the immediate post-war period and how, in order to uncover a new perspective on London fashion, it is necessary to look for evidence that connects individual stories to the businesses and processes that made up the networks of London fashion at this time. In order to achieve this, the project gathers together disparate materials and incomplete records—from clothing to newspapers and business archives—and considers the evidence offered by each of their different forms.

Together, the individual stories contained in the archive build an understanding of fashion's processes and cultures in which the sum is more than the addition of each

[1] Bide, 'Signs of Wear', 470-471.

individual part. Drawing on more-than-representational research approaches, this project creates an impression of the relationship between fashion, austerity and the city by foregrounding the importance of the small details that reveal the routines, expressions and embodied understandings that gave shape to individual experiences of fashion in post-war London in order to tell a more comprehensive—and, at times, even experiential—fashion history.[2]

Bringing archival material together with the Museum of London's fashion collections

Working embedded within a museum and its collection placed materiality at the heart of this project. Following in the footsteps of historians such as Rebecca Arnold, this project always intended to use fashion objects as 'vital pieces of primary evidence, rather than merely as illustrations'.[3] However, exposure to Museum of London's fashion collection over a three-year period prompted deeper consideration of the ability of objects to tell the histories of people and places. The Museum of London is an institution with a long history of recognising the valuable role that clothes can play in telling the social history of the city. In 1933, the Museum became the first in Britain to publish a catalogue of its costume collection, and today it is home to over 24,000 fashion objects, which speak to more than six hundred years of London lives. Much of the value of the Museum's collection lies in its diversity. It is a social history collection containing items from a range of disparate sources, representing some of the complexity of London's socio-economic, geographic and ethnic make-up. Crucially, the majority of its holdings are ordinary, everyday clothes. These garments, worn over a long period of time, speak of lingering and changing experiences rather than representing the brevity of a passing fashion trend or a single occasion of wear.

As I revisited the collection over and over again, my experiences of the objects within it—and my perception of their value—similarly changed.[4] I learned to look beyond the surface of their design to notice the different ways that London hands had shaped these objects, from the details of their stitching to the stains and ripped

[2] Lorimer, 'Cultural Geography', 84.
[3] Arnold, *The American Look*, 10.
[4] Miller, *Material Cultures and Mass Consumption*, 3.

seams and patches of darning that indicated how they had been worn, and I began to consider how these small-scale material clues communicated the intricate, varied and sometimes messy realities of a city made up of interrelated but individual histories.[5]

Engaging with the highly personal materiality of this collection encouraged me to think again about the different stories that it contains, beyond those formally catalogued in Mimsy—the Museum's electronic database. The multiple collecting policies of the different institutions out of which the Museum of London was originally formed, not to mention the changing priorities of curators over time, have brought a fantastically diverse range of objects into the archive. This presents the researcher with the challenge of determining how to interpret this fragmentary collection, because its full importance is not always captured by the standardised set of information recorded in the Museum's database for each item. The format of the database focuses on details such as the garment's size, material composition and a brief physical description. Mimsy also provides space to record further relevant details, for example any biographical information about the maker or wearer that is known at the time of acquisition. This inevitably prioritises information regarding where a garment was purchased or worn; unless a garment is home-sewn, the donor is unlikely to know much about its history before the point of purchase.[6] This structured method also foregrounds clothes associated with named designers, as these connections can usually be gleaned from existing labels within a given garment. As a result of this cataloguing process, the stories of many ordinary

[5] This process involved modifying the widely-used model for object analysis recently described by Ingrid Mida and Alexandra Kim, which advocates a tripartite system for analysing material fashion objects, the final stage of which asks researchers to apply historical knowledge to garments in order to contextualise them within broader debates and historical narratives. Instead of focusing exclusively on how garments provided evidence that reinforced orthodox historical narratives, or even found themselves more subtly employed as representational planks to buttress alternative ones, the research process underlying this project considered how the materiality of garments and the researcher's own embodied knowledge could also be used to contextualise a range of other archival materials and relate them to extant garments. Mida and Kim, *The Dress Detective.* For more details on this process, see Bide, 'Signs of Wear', 455-456.

[6] It can be difficult for curators to attach more fulsome types of information to garments that arrive in the collection without supplementary biographical material, since curators need high levels of expertise in fashion from different periods in order to consider how the construction and wear of a garment might be able to provide a form of biographical information—and, even where this exists, few curators are afforded time and autonomy to tackle this daunting task in sufficient depth.

Londoners are absent from the official information recorded about the objects that they created, handled and wore.[7]

Having glimpsed the hidden experiences of the individuals who had shaped the materiality of these garments, I was keen to learn more about the roles these people had played in the wider fashion networks of the city—to see and credit the broader impact that the machinist at a workroom bench or the shop girl in a suburban 'Junior Miss' fashion department made on London fashion and, through this, to gain new perspectives on the varied and overlapping geographies of fashion cities and the processes and collaborations by which they function.[8] To do so, it was necessary to bring the material fashion objects in the Museum together with a wide range of other archival sources.

Many of the materials studied for this project are familiar sources for telling fashion histories. Alongside close looking at material objects, this research surveyed how fashion was depicted in newspapers, magazines, newsreels and films. It studied the business records, photographs and press clippings albums in retail archives and poured over the membership records of the London Branch of the National Union of Tailors and Garment Workers. It looked at documents relating to Board of Trade regulations at the National Archives and it crunched numbers recording the output of London's garment industry from the Board of Trade's *Census of Production*. Looking closely at the way material fashion objects had been shaped by individuals encouraged me to approach these other sources differently, bringing them together in order to speculate as to how these representational sources might reveal material experiences of making, wearing and buying fashion at a time of austerity, and find out what this could contribute to our understanding of London's fashion systems.

Building a more comprehensive understanding of the role of every-day experiences and individuals in shaping the fashion city requires an interdisciplinary approach that straddles the fields of design, social, cultural, and business histories. In response, this project relies upon research undertaken in a range of different archives and draws widely on both official and unofficial sources. Although the

[7] For more information on the impacts of institutional cataloging and acquisition processes, see Steedman, *Dust,* 91; Ogborn, 'Archive', 89.
[8] Adamson, 'Looking at Craft'.

different materialities of paper documents and photographs demand different ways of looking than extant garments, focusing on the small details of how clothes are used in these sources is enormously revealing. For example, considering how Londoners might have understood and interpreted the materiality of clothes in different mediums—from magazine illustrations to film costumes—and how authors and producers would have tried to target and anticipate particular responses from their audiences, highlights the different ways that fashion is used to negotiate and construct ideas of place, cultures and personal identities.

Studying sources in this way has the potential to reveal their disruptive qualities. In a museum context, a disruptive object is one that changes or challenges historical narratives when displayed in a museum by insisting on 'telling us the story of its pre-museal past' (figure 15).[9] Drawing on this concept, this research considers how looking for signs of fashionable experiences in archival sources similarly disrupts linear fashion histories by revealing unusual or contradictory voices that foreground individual, rather than universal, experiences.

Each empirical chapter of this thesis engages with different types of sources in order to uncover material evidence of how people experienced fashion at a time of austerity, and how these experiences shaped the processes and perceptions of London fashion. Chapter three looks to the words and images presented by newspapers and periodicals—ranging from high-end fashion magazines through to daily newspapers and the trade press—to learn more about how the fashion trend that came to be known as the New Look was experienced by Londoners. It considers how journalists relied on the material understanding of readers to communicate ideas about fashion, and how reading this materiality in press sources provides a more diverse understanding of how different demographics experienced fashionable change than the narrow selection of garments held in many museum collections.

[9] Hoberman, *Museum Trouble*, 79.

Figure 15:

Detail of inside skirt seam of printed cotton summer dress. The colouring of the flowers shows that the fabric has been used 'inside out' to make this garment, making it a disruptive object that pushes back against representational narratives about home dressmaking in the 1940s as an activity primarily concerned with pragmatism over individual taste. Instead of providing an example of broad, generic experiences of home sewing, it highlights the impact of the idiosyncratic creative choices made by the sewer on the final product, disrupting the representational narrative by reminding the museum visitor of the individual who shaped this dress. Museum of London, 67.41.

Chapter four, in contrast, primarily looks at material objects to learn more about how austerity changed the cultures and systems of fashionable making in the post-war city. Drawing on literature that considers material objects as processes—rather than things containing a single, clear set of information to be read—it looks closely at extant garments from the collections of the Museum of London, the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and Lasell College.[10] Understanding material objects as processual—as things shaped by the hands they have passed through—makes it possible to read multiple narratives in old clothes, since these extant objects contain evidence of the numerous different processes that transformed their materiality as they moved from sketch to workroom to body.[11] This chapter, however, also uses a wide range of other contextual sources, including Census data, trade directories and trade union archives. These paper records provide information about broad, city-wide trends in manufacturing and, at the same time, they enable us to see evidence

[10] DeSilvey, 'Art and archive'.
[11] Gregson and Crang, 'Materiality and waste', 1026-1032; Kean, *London Stories,* 179.

of the transient and ephemeral processes that shaped people's experiences of London fashion at an individual level.

Chapter five builds on the notion that representational sources, such as photographs and catalogues, can be used to understand the material experiences of activities for which little material evidence remains, namely shopping. While there are no surviving shop window displays or original fashion departments housed in museum collections, evidence as to their nature does exist in the form of business archives, photographs, news articles and newsreel footage, and this chapter draws on these to construct an impression of the effect of changing retail methodologies. Many of the retail archives researched for this chapter are incomplete and fragmentary; they often exist as accidental survivals or, particularly in the case of business archives, reflect the personal interests of certain retailers. Together, however, these sources provide enough information to present a new understanding of how retailers were developing their methodologies, as well as offering an impression of what this changed shopping experience would have looked like for consumers.

Finally, chapter six turns to the presentation of clothes on-screen in order to gain insight into how Londoners thought about fashion in the 1940s. It considers how the ready-to-wear costumes featured in Ealing Studios reveal shared understandings between film producers and audiences about the material meanings of every-day clothes, and asks how the materiality of clothes on-screen can tell us more about the multiple meanings of austerity fashion.[12] It also makes connections between screen and print fashions, using film magazines to demonstrate the powerful influence on-screen clothes had on people's material and symbolic experiences of London fashion.

Towards more-than-representational fashion histories

Looking for signs of material experiences of fashion demands engagement with a diverse range of sources because the processes of fashion are intimately related to cultural, political and economic circumstances. Throughout the majority of the

[12] Bruno, *Surface*, 8.

twentieth century, the clothes stitched on kitchen tables have been connected to the fashions sold in shops, the costume designs of popular films, and the taxation policies of the government of the day.

Clothes straddle the divide between the personal, intimate nature of the body and its public interactions.[13] As a result, they provide a point of connection between the self, society and the city, and they play a role in the relational construction of fashionable identity.[14] But the networks of fashionable experience—where the garments we see friends and family make and wear influence our choices, as do the images in magazines of things that we would love to own but lie outside of our financial resources—are shaped by both material and representational encounters.[15] What we see and want but cannot have can be just as important to our fashionable identities as what we actually put on. In turn, these personal networks form part of the complex web of processes that shape the nature of the fashion city and connect the designers, makers, suppliers, retailers, journalists, and consumers who operate within it.

The complexity of the networks and systems of London fashion in relation to individual experiences highlights the difficulty of using archival materials to construct a single, definitive narrative about the relationship between fashion, austerity and the post-war city. Instead, this project tells new stories about austerity fashion by creating encounters with the historical networks, connections and experiences of fashionable London through the way it approaches archival materials. To do so, it turns to non-representational theory, which provides a model through which material objects can be freed from their representational role as containers of meaning awaiting interpretation.[16] Instead, non-representational theory proposes a focus on the small details that shape lived experience, the 'everyday routines, fleeting encounters, embodied movements'.[17] Conceiving of museum fashion objects and archival materials in this way gives a different insight

[13] Young, 'Women Recovering Our Clothes', 63-74.
[14] As Sophie Woodward has explained, the giving and receiving of second-hand clothing plays a role in the relational construction of fashionable identity, providing a way for people to negotiate notions of kinship and understand shared aesthetics and social roles. Woodward, *Why Women Wear What They Wear*, 101; Corrigan, *The Dressed Society*, 109-128.
[15] Steedman, Landscape for a Good Woman, 15.
[16] Thrift, *Non-representational theory*.
[17] Lorimer, 'Cultural geography', 84.

into the systems of the fashion city, revealing how these sources might have affected the people who encountered them. Rather than taking a strictly non-representational approach, however, this thesis combines material sources with representational ones by taking a more-than-representational approach to researching the processes of the fashion city in order to build a new understanding, using diverse source material, of what it might have been like to experience the shape and energy of London fashion at a time of austerity.[18]

Drawing from more-than-representational research approaches to tell fashion histories relies to a large extent on the researcher's ability to relate to sources through their own personal fashion experiences—turning an engaged and critical eye on questions of what marks on clothes might mean about how they were experienced. Numerous historians have noted the impossibility of approaching an archive with total objectivity, free from the motivations of 'longing and appropriation'.[19] Researching fashion—both in its material and representational forms—without subjectivity seems especially difficult due to the shared bodily knowledge through which we relate to clothes. Even clothes from the past that differ substantially in their materials and construction from contemporary fashions contain elements of a shared language of wear.

As a result, the work of cultural geographers such as Gillian Rose, who demonstrated the complex cultural politics of authorship in archival research by reflexively situating herself in the archives she researched, was particularly useful in negotiating this research process.[20] Archives and collections do not contain a single, clear set of factual information to be uncovered, and as researchers we are drawn not only to the material that best fits the story we want to tell, but also to that which speaks to us personally.[21] Hayden Lorimer has explained how, by embracing archival research as a series of 'chance occurrences' between researcher and fragments of material, it is possible to develop a collaborative approach where remembered stories, objects and theories interact to tease out new versions and perspectives of existing narratives in a 'creative form of cultural recycling'.[22] The

[18] Ibid.
[19] Sassoon, 'Chasing Phantoms in the Archives'. See also Steedman, *Dust*, 81.
[20] Rose, 'Practising photography'.
[21] DeSilvey, 'Art and archive'.
[22] Lorimer, 'Caught in the Nick of Time', 259.

close study of fashion offers particularly rich opportunities for exploring this type of co-authorship because our knowledge and understanding of the past is rooted in the body, meaning that clothes and textiles play a special role in recalling the past due to the way they take an imprint of the bodies that have worn them.[23]

The approach taken by this thesis challenges the boundaries between different types of sources. It questions how materiality can be understood through the study of representational and non-material sources by considering how the physicality of clothing is translated into other media, including text, image and film.[24] By tracing evidence of lost materialities in these sources, the thesis overcomes gaps in the record to create a more complete understanding of the substance of London fashion at a time of austerity. This fulsome understanding is also achieved by drawing on ideas that bridge the divide between authorial intent and public reception, particularly literary Reader Response theory, which considers that, while an author's intent cannot be fully recovered from a text, the reader's experience of authorial meaning can provide a rich source for analysis.[25] Bringing together these ideas about meaning and materiality enables new ways of thinking about how clothes in images and on-screen formed part of the same networks of London fashion as the material objects produced, sold and worn in the city.

Making connections between sources across different archives disrupts existing historical orthodoxies by revealing how knowledge about the fashion city is shaped by the institutions and processes that hold these records. In a similar way to more traditional methods of discourse analysis, considering why archives prioritised certain types of materials—for example, asking questions about what was missing and noting what information was privileged in the catalogue descriptions—exposes the institutionalised patterns of knowledge about fashion in post-war London, and offers insight into the motivations and the power structures that lie behind these.[26] Bringing together different types of materials also creates space to consider how incomplete fragments and odd pieces of ephemera—such as the scribbled notes on

[23] See Csordas, 'The Body as Representation'; Hunt, 'Worn Clothes and Textiles as Archives of Memory', 208; Stallybrass, 'Worn worlds'.
[24] Bruno, *Surfaces*, 7.
[25] Eagleton, *Literary Theory,* 66-67.
[26] Drawing on the idea that 'knowledge', as presented by institutions, is a discursive practice. Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge*, 200-205.

the back of official documents—relate to the items deemed worthy of preserving in formal collections. Indeed, these chance discoveries often uncovered novel meanings in the materials they sat alongside, demonstrating how accidental interactions with unexpected things can disrupt the institutional power of carefully curated collections.

Although the representational study of fashion still has much to add to our historical understanding, taking a more-than-representational approach expands the possibilities of how sources can be used to tell new historical narratives. In particular, the focus on experience foregrounded by more-than-representational approaches offers opportunities to explore connections between the past and the present.[27] Combining materials from official and unofficial sources required me to confront my own prejudices and preferences in the materials I chose to use and those which I passed over. These selections revealed how cultural narratives about post-war austerity continue to shape my own interests in fashion. More broadly, it showed how these stories contribute to my understanding of the city where I live and, as a result, how their retelling had the power to change my experience of London today.

[27] Patchett, 'The taxidermist's apprentice'.

Archival encounter no. 3:

68.58: Double-breasted overcoat from 1946 made of a brown herringbone weave wool. Later adapted to conform to New Look fashions

Figure 16:

Double-breasted overcoat from 1946, adapted to conform to New Look fashions. Museum of London, 68.58.

It is August 2015, and I am rifling through the paper acquisition files for garments donated to and purchased by the museum in the 1960s. These contain correspondence and notes from donors and curators, detailing information that never made it into the official catalogue entries. Amongst these letters is one from a donor of a brown herringbone wool coat. The coat was originally purchased in 1946, and its design suggests it was likely made before austerity design restrictions were lifted in March that year. The only anomalous design feature is the six buttons—two more than restrictions allowed. The donor's letter explains these extra buttons by detailing how this classic Utility coat was altered in the late 1940s to bring it more up-to-date with changing styles and, in particular, the New Look silhouette.

The coat was modified to give it softer shoulders, a more fitted waist and a longer hem to keep pace with late 1940s fashions. To achieve this effect, the large shoulder pads—popular in 1946 due to the post-liberation fashions coming out of Paris—were removed. The waist was taken-in by putting in new darts and an extra set of buttons was added below the existing two rows in order to further define the waist. Finally, the hem was taken-down to make the coat longer, and the 'CC41' Utility label, which had become an unfashionable reminder of continuing austerity, was removed. It is questionable how much these alterations would have made this classic Utility coat look up-to-date. There was still a large amount of fabric at the shoulders, and the austerity restrictions the coat was made under only gave a narrow seam allowance, so the hem could not have been lengthened by a great deal. However, the fact that these alterations were undertaken is a reminder that while affording and purchasing the New Look may have been exclusive, experiencing it was not: in spite of their different experiences of austerity, fashion was available to and embraced by Londoners from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds and age brackets.

The adaptations undergone by this coat are also a reminder that the look of people on the streets of London would have been very different to the images seen in adverts and magazine editorials at this time, because clothes purchased when fashionable continued to be worn for many years after. This was particularly true for high-value and hard-wearing items such as this wool coat. It is, however, difficult to know exactly what the effects of these adaptations were on the look of the coat, as, buttons aside, these adaptations were removed by curatorial staff after the coat was acquisitioned. It is unlikely this undoing of a garment's history would be undertaken today, but the desire for garments to tell simple narratives, neatly divided between austerity shortages and New Look affluence persists in many museum displays. This coat is a challenge to such periodisation. Furthermore, it is a reminder of what can be lost when preconceptions of what the past should look like are allowed to shape the archive.

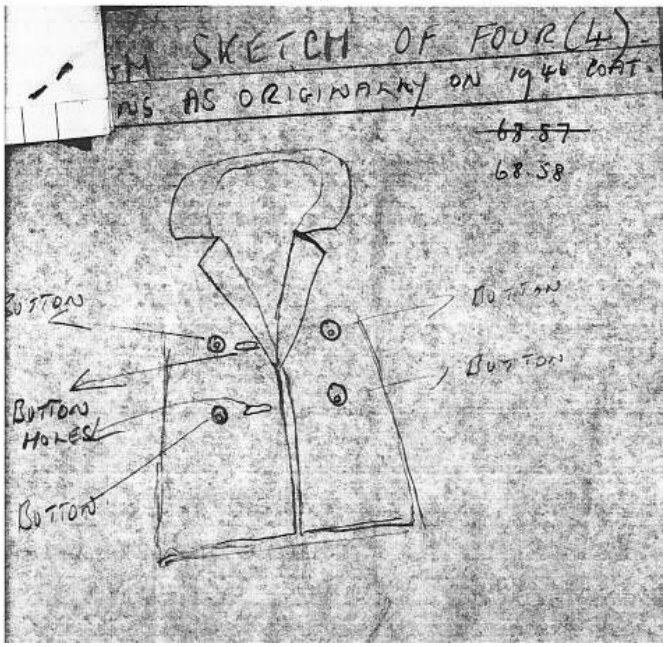

Figure 17:

Sketch by donor showing original positions of buttons. Museum of London, 68.58.

Figure 18:

Vani-tred shoe advert. *Harper's Bazaar*, January-February 1945, back cover.

Three:

Writing austerity fashion

Figure 19:

Clifford Coffin's image of a model, dressed in a ball gown in the remains of a bombed-out London house, captures the popular idea of the New Look as a trend that set the glamour of new fashions against lingering post-war austerity. Vogue, June 1947, 32. Clifford Coffin/Vogue.

From the entire canon of twentieth century fashion history, 12 February 1947 is perhaps the best-known date. Its story is set in a snowy and austere Paris. The city was in the grip of yet another bitterly cold winter, compounding the difficulties of its post-war struggle against structural damage, shortages and a weakened economy. It was against the odds of these inauspicious circumstances that a new designer called Christian Dior unveiled his first collection.[1] This 'Corolle' line, we are told, changed the look of women's fashion and even found a way to bring fashionable glamour and beauty back to the dingy, bomb-damaged streets of London.[2]

The story follows that the garments Dior showed that day stunned the audience assembled at number 30, Avenue Montaigne. Their sculpted and extravagant femininity was so radical that it caused Carmel Snow—then editor in chief of *Harper's Bazaar* in America—to exclaim 'This changes everything. It's quite a revelation dear Christian, your dresses have such a new look', providing the trend with a name that caught on as quickly as the styles themselves.[3] The runaway success of this 'New Look' catapulted Dior into the media spotlight and lowered the hemlines of women's fashions on an international scale. It was the irresistible appeal of the New Look's much longed for femininity, we are told, that succeeded in finally banishing the austere fashions of wartime.[4] The style heralded a new era in Western fashion history and a new lease of life for Paris fashion, which was 'saved' by Dior in the face of competition from New York and London.[5] In fact, Dior's inaugural collection is considered so important that the calendar of fashionable time is measured around this date, with both books and exhibitions using 1947 to mark the birth of modern fashion in the West.[6]

But, pull on any one of the many loose threads in this story and the narrative quickly starts to unravel. Historians have quietly noted that Dior's Corolle line was not quite the turning point it is often credited to be—indeed, that it was not the first instance of the fuller and longer skirt or softer, more rounded shape to be seen in post-war

[1] Dior, *Dior by Dior*, 26-28.
[2] McDowell, *Forties Fashion*, 179.
[3] Rowlands, *A Dash of Daring,* 365; Rethy, *Christian Dior*, 90.
[4] Cawthorne, *The New Look*, 13.
[5] Steele, *Fifty Years of Fashion*, 11.
[6] See De la Haye, *The Cutting Edge*; Steele, *Fifty Years of Fashion*; and the exhibition *The Glamour of Italian Fashion 1944-2014* at the Victoria and Albert Museum, 5 April-27 July 2014.

fashion.[7] Dior's previous work for Lucian Lelong had featured similar shapes; other couturiers had done the same, including London-based Hardy Amies and Norman Hartnell, even if austerity restrictions on goods for the home market limited these features to their export collections.[8] These trends were also visible in British ready-to-wear prior to this time, with the Utility collections from spring 1946 clearly showing evidence of longer skirts—falling below the knee—and less-structured shoulders.[9] In fact, contrary to the popular portrayal of the mid 1940s as a fashionable void waiting to be filled by the New Look, this chapter discusses how the immediate post-war period saw a plethora of emerging styles and variations as designers turned to exaggerated shapes and a wide spread of historical fashions among other influences for inspiration.

The ease with which the mythology of the New Look comes apart raises questions about how fashion mythologies are constructed and what is required for researchers to unpick them and discover the alternative accounts that lie beneath. The nature of this mythologizing prompts careful consideration of the text, image and material sources that are commonly cited to tell fashion histories, the layers of meaning and motivation buried therein, and the different types of stories these materials can be used to tell. More specifically to this period, the structural weakness in popular accounts of the New Look demonstrates the need to reexamine the orthodox understanding of the 1940s as a decade of binary fashions, split down 1947 between austerity and the New Look. Questioning the validity of this periodisation also raises doubts about the accepted geographies of post-war fashion, in which the bleak narratives of rationing and wartime fashion are set in Britain while the story of post-war change is told from Paris. This chapter muddies these clear divisions of time and place by investigating the gap between the mythology of the New Look—as presented in popular fashion histories—and the reality of its public reception in London.

Since the stylistic tenets of the New Look pre-dated Dior, this chapter opens by investigating how the mythologies that connect Dior to the New Look were constructed, discussing what this process tells us about the influence and power of

[7] McDowell, *Forties Fashion*, 175.
[8] Lourdes Font, 'Dior Before Dior', 28. Evidence for this trend can even be seen as far back as 1938, before the war disrupted fashion, when Hardy Amies sent his models out 'in old fashioned stays' to show off his spring collection. McDowell, *Forties Fashion*, 8.
[9] Walford, *Forties Fashion*, 182.

those who controlled the way fashionable narratives were told at this time. It also highlights an overlooked issue inherent in relying on using museum collections as the basis to research the materiality of the New Look; although material examples of garments considered to be 'New Look' are present in collections, these pieces generally represent an extremely narrow set of privileged experiences of the trend by a minority of the population.

To research how the New Look was experienced by ordinary Londoners, it is necessary to look beyond Dior and high-end fashions. This chapter proposes that turning to representational press sources, rather than extant garments, provides a means to understand the material experiences of a more varied set of the city's demographics. Examining how words and images work together in these media sources demonstrates that London publications expected their readers to have a sophisticated material understanding of the construction and quality of different types of fashion. By considering how the words and images on the page draw on an implied material understanding from the reader to communicate messages about changing fashions, this chapter asks how these representational sources can be used to pick apart the different aspects of this fashion trend and their meanings to a variety of Londoners, making it possible to separate out the associations Londoners had with the name Dior and the phrase 'New Look' from how they experienced the stylistic features of the trend, such as hem lengths, and also from the emotional responses they had to news of changing fashions.

The second part of this chapter puts this idea in to practice by using these 1940s sources to consider how New Look mythologies can be deconstructed by approaching fashion history with a sensitivity for the variation in the specific geographies where styles and evolving trends were discussed and consumed. It looks to a broad range of London-published press sources, encompassing a wide variety of demographics and interests. It uses these to first construct an alternative timeline that shows how the New Look trend unfolded in the city, and then to build a clearer definition of the physical traits that comprise what Londoners understood the New Look to be. Analysing the relationship between the specific words and images used by press sources, how they changed throughout the period, and what projects may have motivated those writers, provides a more complete understanding of the local

influences that shaped how this international trend was produced and consumed in London. By conducting a geographically specific study across a broad range of media, this chapter uses the New Look to expose how many of the austerity narratives we know and accept, not to mention other fashion mythologies, come undone when confronted with the specificity of place.

Figure 20:

British film star Susan Shaw shows a London version of the New Look as she poses in a turquoise Windsmoor coat amid the ruins surrounding St. Paul's Cathedral. *Film and Fashion Outlook*, October 1948, back cover.

The New Look: making a fashion mythology

Pulling back the curtain on the mythology that credits Christian Dior with the invention of the stylistic tenets that came to be known as the New Look reveals the project of a highly canny businessman who both understood that his value lay in his personal brand and knew how to market that brand. Dior was a pioneer for the business of the modern fashion industry—something often forgotten behind the glamour of his work as a designer. He was the first fashion designer to sign a licensing agreement and was forward-looking in the way he utilised the free publicity offered by press coverage and collaborated with American ready-to-wear manufactures.[10]

Dior particularly understood the importance of controlling his legacy and, most notably, of laying claim to being the man behind the New Look. It is no accident that the stock illustration used to exemplify the New Look is a black and white image of a woman standing on the banks of the Seine, wearing the 'Bar Suit' from Dior's first 1947 collection (figure 21). Less commonly cited is that this image was produced by Dior's in-house photographer, Willy Maywald, in 1955—eight years after the suit debuted, and long after its style had fallen out of fashion. 1955 was also the year that Dior produced several reproduction versions of the very same outfit, one of which was later gifted to the Victoria and Albert Museum, suggesting a purposeful and thorough campaign to cement his place in design history by making the New Look synonymous with this outfit.[11] The house of Dior has worked to maintain this association, even after his death. Dior's successor, Yves Saint-Laurent, stated his first collection was a tribute to the New Look, and recent Creative Director Raf Simons marked his debut collection in a similar manner.[12] The company even licensed a Barbie doll wearing a miniature replica of the Bar Suit in 1997 to mark the 50th anniversary of the New Look.[13] Through this sustained effort, the plurality of the different styles that made up the New Look trend have been reduced in popular culture—and in many museum fashion collections—to a single garment in a single collection by a single designer. Understanding the importance of commercial

[10] Rowlands, *A Dash of Daring*, 366.
[11] 'Bar Suit' designed 1947 and remade 1955. Gift of Christian Dior. Victoria and Albert Museum, T.376&A-1960.
[12] Simons explained he wanted his debut collection for Dior in 2012 to be a tribute 'to the codes of Dior'. 'Dior's New Look', www.vogue.co.uk, 3 July 2012.
[13] The 'Christian Dior Barbie' (Product Code: 16013) was released on 1 January 1997.

interests in shaping this narrative compels the researcher to uncover alternative sources that support a broader understanding of what the New Look was and how it was experienced.

Figure 21:
Dior's Bar Suit, 1955. Willy Maywald/Dior.

Dior did not construct this valuable narrative of the origins of New Look alone—he relied on a network of powerful social connections. Right from the very early days of his business, Dior cultivated a close relationship with the press through interviews and eye-catching public appearances, especially in America where he conducted lengthy publicity tours. His relationships with prominent fashion journalists helped solidify his status at the top of Parisian couture and, following his death in 1957, ensured that his memory as the father of the New Look lived on in the fashion press and academy.[14]

[14] Settle, 'Fashion and Trade', 94-107.

Fashion writers from the period are often used as key sources by fashion historians looking for evidence about the New Look's origins and influence. While such people were certainly influential tastemakers at the time, it is important to consider that many of their accounts regarding Dior's role as originator of the New Look were written retrospectively once they had become closely acquainted with the man. For example, Bettina Ballard's much quoted commentary of Dior's February 1947 show, 'I was conscious of an electric tension I had never before felt in couture… We were witnessing a revolution in fashion,' suggests, upon reading now, that she had been aware early on of the significance of the event.[15] This quote is from 1960, however, calling into question the extent to which the subsequent success of Dior may have influenced her judgment.[16] The weight attributed to these type of comments reflects a tendency for fashion literature to privilege the voices of a fashionable elite, looking to the well-connected publishers and wealthy society figures who consumed couture whilst overlooking more everyday experiences of fashion. Many of the early references to the New Look in fashion histories are sourced to letters from a small number of very wealthy women who were in Paris for the season's fashion shows.[17] Although the cultural capital of such figures certainly makes their fashionable judgements and experiences significant, it is important that these sources are also recognised as evidence of the systems through which fashion was disseminated and accessed by certain groups, not confused for evidence of a widespread enthusiasm or popular uptake of the trend.

It is also vital to consider the effect of the wider political landscape, and the social hierarchies in which these privileged fashionable voices were operating, on shaping the story they told. Dior's legacy as the creator of the New Look was boosted in Britain by circumstances beyond his control—namely the co-option of fashion into political dialogues. Hansard transcripts show that the New Look, with particular reference to skirt lengths and fullness, was discussed multiple times in the House of Commons between October 1947 and March 1948.[18] There is a broad, although not universal,

[15] Ballard was the fashion editor of *American Vogue* in 1947. Wilcox, *The Golden Age of Couture*, 39.
[16] Ballard, *In My Fashion*, 231.
[17] Wilcox, *The Golden Age of Couture*, 60.
[18] See *Hansard* HC Deb vol 447 col 2101, 26 February 1948, for discussion about the New Look and fair allowance of clothing coupons; and HC Deb vol 445 col 1856, 18 December 1947, for discussion about changing trends threatening to make shop stock obsolete.

political divide present in parliamentary discussions about the New Look. Conservative MPs predominantly described the fashion in terms of a choice women deserve, whereas Labour MPs such as Mabel Ridealgh saw it as elitist and exclusionary. After the government's egalitarian approach to clothing during the war, many Labour MPs strongly resisted any policy changes that would privilege a fashion that was 'only acceptable amongst a limited class of persons.'[19] These parliamentary discussions about the New Look form part of a wider use of clothing as metaphor by politicians at this time. While Labour MPs used the extravagance of Princess Elizabeth's 1947 wedding dress (for which she was granted extra coupons) as a symbol of the unfairness at the heart of the British class system, Conservative MPs used clothing as a representation of the plenty and prosperity they claimed to offer the British public as an alternative to the austerity caused by Labour's socialist agenda.[20] As the MP Thomas Moore put it in one particularly passionate speech on 29 October 1947:

> We Tories believe in incentives. We believe in every individual getting a fair reward for his work whether it is by brain or brawn. We believe in more goods in the shops for the housewife. We believe in prettier clothes for the women with fewer coupons.[21]

The Conservative message that women deserved new fashions exploited a broader resentment amongst the British public that times were still so hard, even though they had emerged victorious from the war. Many people perceived European women as having access to fashions they did not, grumbling (inaccurately) that women in Germany and France had more new clothes than they did, and that this demonstrated how 'We won the war, but they won the peace'.[22] Access to new fashions was also used by the British Housewives' League as shorthand to stand for hard times, demonstrating the depth of anger and sense of unfairness many middle class women in London and the South East felt at the materially diminished circumstances they found themselves in following the war.[23]

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[19] *Hansard*. HC Deb vol 447 col 2101, 26 February 1948.
[20] See Will Nally's contribution to debate on the Civil List. *Hansard.* HC Deb vol 445 col 1715, 17 December 1947.
[21] *Hansard.* HC Deb vol 443 col 877, 29 October 1947.
[22] *An Oral History of British Fashion*. British Library, C1046/02/06 F12812B, 152.
[23] The British Housewives League were a rightwing political organisation who had amassed a membership of more than 70,000 by 1948. Hinton, 'Militant Housewives', 133.

In light of the strength of feelings provoked by discussions of fashion and the New Look, it is likely that the Conservative Party's use of anti-austerity rhetoric, particularly in relation to female consumption, contributed to their triumph at the ballot box in the 1951 general election.[24] The socially conservative beliefs that propelled them to victory also formed the accounts of the New Look that emerged in the 1950s and continue to inform British histories on the subject. Beyond economic concerns, fashion provided a convenient metaphor for the social role of women in post-war Britain. At a time when many people were concerned by increasing numbers of women in the workplace, the language of the New Look, which associated 'femininity' with wide skirts and decorative dress, provided a useful way to strip working women—especially those who wore practical overalls, short skirts or even trousers—of their status as females. Perhaps the most influential example of this narrative is Pearson Phillips's essay on 'The New Look', which appeared in *Age of Austerity*—Michael Sissons and Philip French's 1964 retrospective of the immediate post-war years. Phillips views the fashion trend through the eyes of socially conservative notions of normative femininity. He explains its success in these terms, saying that, in contrast to 'heavy and masculine' wartime fashions, comprised of 'grim box-like garments', 'here was Dior, encouraging women to be women again.'[25] What is particularly shocking about this essay is the influence it still holds over the way that the New Look is commonly discussed even today, and what this tells us about the structures of contemporary society. Although we may like to think that social attitudes to gender have changed since the early 1960s, David Kynaston drew heavily and uncritically from Pearson Phillips's essay in writing his account of the New Look in *Austerity Britain,* published—and widely acclaimed—in 2007.[26] The regressive gender norms perpetuated by this type of retelling provide just one example of the importance of unpicking the mythologies of the New Look in order to disempower the cultural narratives they fuel.

Challenging the mythology of the New Look

To better understand the power structures and vested interests that shaped the popular stories told about fashion at this time and the experiences they conceal, this

[24] This argument is at the heart of Zweiniger-Bargielowska's *Austerity in Britain.*
[25] Phillips, 'The New Look', 134.
[26] See similarities between Kynaston, *Austerity Britain,* 258-259 and Phillips, 'The New Look', 132-134.

chapter turns to the London press and looks closely at the way the New Look was presented to London readers. One of the reasons New Look mythologies persist is because they are not rooted to any specific place, and so evade challenges from historic details. New Look narratives claim to speak of an experience shared across Western fashion. They conflate Britain, continental Europe and North America, universalising women's experiences of the trend by drawing on evidence cited from publications such as *Vogue* and *Harper's Bazaar,* without specifying which international edition is being referred to.[27] Most problematically, they reveal relatively little about how such information was received, allowing fashion history to rely on oversimplified generalisations in place of nuanced understanding.[28]

In response, this research interrogates the New Look mythology by focusing on a specific place—London. In order to find sources that are capable of building an alternative timeline of how the New Look trend developed and was experienced beyond the world of high-end fashion, it analyses the treatment of both Dior and the New Look between 1946 and 1949 in a number of London-based press publications. These dates encompass the emergence of the stylistic tenets we now refer to as the New Look, through to the moment when 'New Look' ceased to be used as a description of current fashion by the press. The publications studied were written for a variety of demographics and encompass specialist fashion magazines such as *Vogue* and *Harper's Bazaar*, to mass-market publications and daily newspapers, as well as examples of the specialist trade press, including *The Maker-Up* and *The Tailor and Cutter*.

The geographical specificity of this study is important because, even if fashion publications are to be considered 'truthful mirrors of their time,' specific publications are only able to reflect the particular places and demographics they serve.[30] Indeed, there are noticeable differences between the fashion coverage produced by London-based newspapers and those published elsewhere in the country. For example, the

[27] Unless otherwise stated, all publications mentioned in this thesis are British editions.
[28] In contrast, research that looks to a broader range of sources can understand how fashions were adapted and experienced by different individuals. For example, Angela Partington's research into the adoption of New Look styles by working class women revealed that, rather than copying faithfully from existing designs, people mixed multiple styles—for example, combining the full skirt of the New Look with the top of a shirtwaister dress—in order to create new fashions that suited their purposes better. Partington, 'Popular Fashion and Working Class Affluence', 145-161.
[30] Miller, 'Taste, Fashion and the French Fashion Magazine', 13.

Manchester Guardian is frequently condemnatory about the way fashion correspondents from London focused on high-end designs, explaining that their 'elegant clothes and hats' demonstrated how out of touch they were with the day-to-day realities of life outside the Capital.[31] Although some of the sources used, such as *Vogue* and the *Daily Mail*, were distributed nationally, their content speaks strongly to their London publishing location. As both Agnès Rocomora and David Gilbert have noted, the commodification of the city is a process that occurs not only in the fashion industry itself, but also in surrounding fields, from travel to fashion media.[32] As such, geography is far more crucial in shaping media representations of fashion (and vice versa) than fashion literature often acknowledges.

Contextual information about the place and time of publication is vital for interrogating the subtleties of how language and image operate in the fashion press. Fashion histories that draw on images of clothes too often accept and use visual clues, uncritically, as accurate representations of garments and fashion trends, without considering how they reflect the social circumstances, politics and aspirations of a publication's readership.[33] For example, the *Daily Mail*'s fashion pages were broadly positive about the longer and fuller skirts of the New Look at times when many other publications, such as the *Observer* and the *Daily Telegraph* were printing copy that favoured a more restrained approach to fashion change. This must be evaluated in the context of the anti-austerity editorial line adopted across the *Daily Mail* at this time, which was closely connected to the political leanings of the owner Esmond Harmsworth—a fierce critic of the government and their austerity policies.[34] Similarly, the language of fashion editorials deserves greater scrutiny in order to understand how it relates to both images and the fashionable knowledge of a particular readership.

The conceptual and material variations in what was meant by the phrase 'New Look' in these publications makes it difficult to establish what exactly counts as a reference to the New Look; does it have to be a reference to Dior or should one also count

[31] *Manchester Guardian*, 1 October 1948.
[32] Rocamora, *Fashioning the city,* XIV.
[33] In this respect at least, Malcolm Barnard's assertion that 'The visual has remained relatively neglected in fashion studies' remains true. Barnard, *Fashion as Communication*, 416.
[34] Esmond Harmsworth had a history of campaigning for lower taxes and less state intervention. Needless to say, Harmsworth's passion for small government ran counter to the post-war Labour administration. Webber, *The Ideology of the British Right*, 21.

references to 'the new line' or 'new silhouette'? The newspapers of 1946 and 1947 promise the 'new' nearly every day—from discussions of 'The New American Look' and 'The New Shiny Look' to outright declarations that 'there's a new look about'.[35] Even the precise origins of the New Look as a capitalised, proper noun are hazy. Dior himself referred to his spring 1947 collection as 'la linge Carolle', but the 'New Look' seems to have become its semiofficial title from very early on. While the name is commonly credited to Carmel Snow, whether she uttered these words whilst still at the show or composed them carefully afterwards in a cable back to her American publishers is unclear.[36]

While there is evidence that the name caught on very quickly, it seems that its specific usage—as related to Dior's designs—was confined to a small group of elite women. 'The New Look' was referred to in several letters from February 1947, written by the kind of people with social connections that allowed them to sprinkle their correspondence with references to 'Mrs Snow' and meetings with well-known socialites.[38] Outside of such circles, there is scant evidence to suggest that either the phrase or Dior's line itself initially made a great deal of impact in London, where Dior's debut was widely ignored by the popular press until the autumn of 1947. In fact, the use of New Look as a proper noun in the London press did not emerge until late 1947, many months after Dior's Corolle line, and even after the autumn fashion collections in London had provoke front page news about falling hemlines. Meanwhile, stylistic elements of the fashion we now know as New Look can be seen emerging in the press as early as 1946.

This research considers how the relationship between words and pictures can be used to build a more coherent account of how the 'New Look' came to be understood as common shorthand for a complex and constantly evolving fashion trend. In order to understand how the New Look was experienced in London, this chapter unpicks the trend to see how three separate aspects interacted—the changing physical characteristics of garments; the abstract concept of a new fashion trend and how this was coopted into wider cultural (and political) narratives; and the New Look title and its relationship to Dior. Furthermore, by focusing on how the text and images work

[35] *Harper's Bazaar*, July-August 1946, 24.
[36] Different accounts appear in Cawthorne, *The New Look*, 109; Rowlands, *A dash of daring,* 365.
[38] Steele, *Fifty Years of Fashion*, 11.

together to convey to readers a sense of the weight, structure and feel of garments, this chapter argues that flat images of fashions can provide evidence as to the material experiences of the different demographs who consumed these articles, allowing for a more rounded understanding of the New Look that encompasses both couture design and the materiality of ready-to-wear clothing.[39]

London experiences of the New Look

Timeline of the New Look in London

Spring-Summer 1947: a lack of interest

In the spring of 1947, there was little initial fanfare or celebration of either Christian Dior or a new fashion trend. *Vogue*'s Paris collections edition of March 1947 mutely commented that the season's fashion 'develops current trends; makes no revolutionary breakaways.' In doing so, editorial staff indicated that they considered the spring collections to be a continuation of existing trends, albeit with longer skirts.[41] The report goes on to list a number of features that are now considered to be characteristic of the New Look: 'waists are smaller than ever; fitted close over nipped corsets', 'Jackets are around wrist-length, waisted' and 'shoulders have rounded padding, stressing the natural slope.' These reports reveal by omission that, at this time, there were no direct associations in Britain between these stylistic features and any particular designer nor any novelty in their appearance. *Vogue*'s next issue reinforces this approach—although it devotes an entire page to Dior—'the new name in Paris', it does not credit him for any dramatic new innovation, only for using 'fabric lavishly in skirts'.[42] From a survey of British fashion and trade publications released that spring, *Harper's Bazaar* was the only one to link a new trend explicitly to Dior, proclaiming 'The big story is a curving, opulent day silhouette that is the most elegant fashion for decades. Its best blossoming is at the new house of Christian Dior.'[43]

[39] This approach can be considered an exploration of Anne Hollander's theory that 'the study of clothes has no real substance other than in images of clothes'. Hollander, *Seeing Through Clothes*, 454.
[41] *Vogue*, March 1947, 71.
[42] *Vogue*, April 1947, 47.
[43] *Harper's Bazaar*, April 1947, 27.

Outside of the specialist press, it is surprising to find quite how little impact the Corolle line actually had in Britain at the time of its unveiling. On 3 March, the Evening Standard's 'Londoner's Diary' mentions Dior in passing as a 'new name in Paris fashion,' while on 21 March, Frances Marshall lists Dior in the *Daily Mail* as one of

Figure 22:

Illustration of Dior outfit in the same *Vogue* report that noted how Paris's spring collections made 'no revolutionary breakaways'. *Vogue,* March 1947, 73.

several designers experimenting with 'A new postwar line'.[44] Like the specialist fashion press, none of these discussions of Dior or his collection refer to a trend called the New Look. These scant mentions are significant not just as evidence of Dior's small influence at this point, but because they indicate that this early lack of interest was not the result of government requests for the press to limit coverage of the trend—as claimed in subsequent years by Alison Settle, who had served as Editor of British *Vogue* before the war and wrote regularly for the *Observer* during the late 1940s.[45] While the Board of Trade may have been opposed to dramatically longer skirts, there

[44] *Evening Standard*, 3 March 1947; *Daily Mail*, 21 March 1947.
[45] Wilcox, *The Golden Age of Couture*, 40.

seems no further evidence of any official moratorium on the press in these early months that would have hindered the spreading of news about the New Look. Public comments by Harold Wilson at the time he became president of the Board of Trade in September 1947 indicate he was largely reluctant to involve himself in the debate about hemlines, and in fact Settle herself did not shy away from discussing Dior's work in the spring of 1947, making her one of the first members of the British press to do so.[47] Rather, it seems more likely that this general lack of interest was related to a lack of consumer access and availability—new fashions that had not yet made their way into shops were of little concern to the general public.

Autumn 1947: hem lines and public debate

It was not until late summer 1947 that changing trends started to make headlines in the form of falling hem lines. London designers were finding it increasingly difficult to keep up with this new trend for longer skirts due to fabric shortages, making fashion an economic as well as a sartorial issue. As Settle wrote in her *Observer* column in August 1947, this inability to keep pace was not necessarily a problem for the home market, but British dressmakers were complaining that Paris had put London 'in the soup' in terms of the export market, as 'Buyers, influenced by the American demand for skirts no shorter than thirteen inches from the ground (and full at that) are asking for a new type of skirt to be substituted for the ones designed and shown before those Paris collections'.[48]

With the showing of autumn designer collections in both London and Paris came a broader public awareness of falling hemlines, even outside of the fashion-conscious segments of the city, and as a result, by early October 1947 discussions of fashions had spread from the women's pages to the letters pages of newspapers. Indeed, examining these sources, it becomes clear that the strength of feelings on either side of the hem line argument were not so much roused by the specifics of the fashion trend, but that fashion provided an outlet for much broader public debates about

[47] Harold Wilson told parliament in a debate on 'Women's Clothing' that 'we would not be prepared now to try any further dictation [outside of existing rationing and Utility regulation] about women's fashions'. *Hansard*. HC Deb vol 447 col 2102, 26 February 1948. Alison Settle proclaimed Dior as 'A new star'. *Observer*, 16 February 1947.

[48] *Observer*, 31 August 1947. N.B., this posed a dilemma, as it is uneconomic to cut skirts differently for the home and export markets, and there is not enough material available to cut the longer skirts for both.

austerity policies, the role of government, and the place of women in society. In more conservative-leaning publications, the letters pages frequently call for greater freedoms for people to embrace these new fashions, portraying a post-war society rapidly losing patience with government controls.[49] Meanwhile, in publications that were generally more supportive of the Labour government, the emergence of a longer and fuller skirt in fashion symbolised a return to a more divided society following a perceived 'fairness' in fashion created by the uniformity of wartime restrictions. However, despite taking opposite sides of this proxy debate, these very different accounts were aligned in one notable area—a near complete lack of material specificity about what exactly this new trend entailed. These letters and articles provided overblown details of the excessive volume of fabric required and, where illustrations were included, they were severely exaggerated (figure 23), indicating that, for the general readers of these publications, this new style was more of an abstract political symbol than it was a tangible reality.

Britain Will Follow The "Lean" Line

NEW YORK FALLS FOR FULL "DOME" SKIRT

HERE is further news on the new controversial lines that Paris has crystallised this autumn. Both the models sketched impressed me as international "fashion makers" when I reviewed the Paris parades last month. Owing to the export rules of Paris couture, they were only recently released for publication.

Both styles are by the new designer, Christian Dior, who is influencing world fashion more than any man in recent years.

The London wholesale dress industry, forced to consider economy in fabrics, favours the "Lean" Line sketched on left. Original models are now being adapted by the wholesalers. New York has gone mad about the "Dome" skirt, seen on right.

Daily Telegraph Dress Critic

Figure 23:

The 'Full "Dome" skirt' is illustrated without consideration of its cut or construction, but as a vast mass of fabric in opposition to the 'economy in fabrics' that, according to the copy, constrained London makers. *Daily Telegraph*, 29 September 1947.

[49] For example, one letters page was titled 'In a straight fight—Fashion v The Politicians-Fashion has won on points the battle for longer skirts'. *News of the World*, 5 October 1947.

Opponents of longer skirts utilised these exaggerated materialities to evoke a sense of unfairness in relation to the trend. Many commentators focused on their readers understanding that large quantities of fabric were a luxury in order to highlight differences between the haves and have-nots of British society. In her *Observer* column, Alison Settle noted with regret that, as a result of the growing differences between narrow Utility styles and fuller non-Utility garments, 'How a woman looks may once again become a matter of economics.'[50] This sense of unfairness was particularly keenly evoked in publications targeting a more lower-middle and working class readership, such as *Woman's Weekly*, who reassured readers that they were not alone in their worries about longer skirts.[51]

A number of political commentators, female journalists and Labour politicians—most vocally, the MP Mabel Ridealgh—went even further in the negative material associations they used when writing articles about the New Look. They employed descriptions of uncomfortable clothing to vocalise their concern that the problem with these new fashions went far deeper than the number of coupons they required, evoking a sense of physical discomfort to argue that the trend was regressive for women, by this time used to the freedoms of movement allowed by the more masculine styles that they had become accustomed to wearing during the war.[52] As Marjorie Beckett complained in *Picture Post*: 'We are back to the days when fashion was the prerogative of the leisured wealthy woman […] imagine voluntarily adding to the fatigue of standing in the fish queue by having twenty yards of it [wool tweed] hanging from ones waist.'[53] Beckett's description implies the extent to which the emerging trend for longer, fuller skirts had been coopted as a political metaphor for the return of both economic and social conservatism. From this perspective, the

[50] *Observer*, 5 October 1947. One suspects Settle is being willfully naïve in this generalisations; as is evident from the society pages of *The Tatler and Bystander*, wealthier women already have access to new styles earlier than the majority, with many clearly wearing London Look suits from 1946, that contrasted sharply from the short, square styles of dress patterns that can be seen in *Woman's Weekly* from the same period.
[51] *Woman's Weekly*, 23 August 1947, 226. *Woman's Weekly* offers numerous tips throughout 1947 and the first half of 1948 as to how to remedy the problem of lengthening skirts. These include adding 'a plaid waist section' (6 September 1947, 295) or a 'pleated frill' to the hem (11 October 1947, 459). Above all, the magazine advises women 'don't be apologetic' but to be bold instead by using contrasting colours (15 November 1947, 605).
[52] Lady Astor described how 'I have no time for the New Look. These dresses are designed for the Victorian age, when women led a gentle life'. *Daily Graphic*, 10 January 1948.
[53] *Picture Post*, 27 September 1947.

negative reaction against falling hem lines in liberal circles, which is often scorned as melodramatic by present-day commentators who point out that 'There was nothing intrinsically submissive about the New Look', seems considerably more understandable.[54]

Winter 1947-1948: the arrival—and departure—of the New Look

While the dropped hem line and other stylistic features that we now associate with the New Look loomed large in public consciousness throughout the autumn of 1947, the look only became the New Look in the press from late October onwards. The *Evening Standard,* a London newspaper, was one of the first publications to mention the New Look by name on 28 October.[55] This London reference came a full month and a half before it was used by a national newspaper, the *Daily Mail* on 12 December.[56] Both its use and the context in which it was used by the *Evening Standard*—firstly in reference to the new lines shown by London wholesale houses and then to describe an outfit on sale in Fenwicks—makes an important connection between the appearance of new style clothes in shops and the adoption of the name in the public imagination, implying that the quantity of fashion businesses and high-end retailers in the city may have given Londoners privileged access to new fashions. This also indicates that a significant proportion of London's shoppers would have associated the words 'New Look' more with shop-bought mass market fashions than they did with any specific collection from a Parisian couturier (figure 24).

References to the New Look were in common use across the national press by mid-January 1948. Yet by the time the spring 1948 collections were reported, a gulf had begun to emerge between the coverage of the season's new trends by the fashion press and the reporting by the mainstream press of New Look lines becoming available in shops: at the same time the fashion press reported back from the spring 1948 shows on the movement of Parisian fashions away from New Look styles, daily

[54] Phillips, 'The New Look', 150. Kynaston also implies that fears about the New Look being 'regressive' were overblown. Kynaston, *Austerity Britain,* 258-259. See also Partington, 'Popular Fashion and Working Class Affluence', 145-146.
[55] *Evening Standard*, 28 October 1947.
[56] *Daily Mail*, 12 December 1947.

newspapers were celebrating the arrival of widely available New Look styles in mass market ready-to-wear.[57] Even within Britain though, it is clear that a substantially

Women of average means wondering how the "New Look" can be interpreted in terms of inexpensive clothes, are not being neglected, writes Edna McKenna. This youthful dress, with nipped-in waist, is one of several creations by Blanes, prototypes of 70,000 similar inexpensive models on sale between now and May.

Figure 24:

The *Daily Graphic* offers this Blanes ready-to-wear dress as an example of the New Look for 'Women of average means', suggesting that many readers would have associated the phrase with inexpensive dresses that were not restrictively structured and did not require bulky undergarments. *Daily Graphic*, 22 December 1947.

distinct trend had adopted the New Look title. Looking at the illustrations that accompany these articles it becomes clear that the New Look they describe is markedly different to the one originally praised by Carmel Snow. Rather, these are 'newtility'—ready-to-wear New Looks made in accordance with the Utility scheme.[58] They are not celebrated for their sculpted shapes or even as an escape from austerity,

[57] Fashion columnists advised on how to create 'New style clothes from "old look" bargains' (*Daily Telegraph*, 19 January 1948), and the January papers are crowded with articles about huge discounts as retailers attempt to get rid of old-fashioned stock, seeing 'West End coats cut to clear the way for the New Look spring fashions' (*Daily Mail*, 3 January 1948).

[58] The first use of this term in the popular press can be found in the *Evening Standard*, 27 November 1947.

but for being clever in their economic cuts where 'fullness springs from the hips' rather than from a lavish use of fabric.[59] Notably, the illustrations that accompany such descriptions emphasise details about the construction of the garments such as the placing of seams and how the fabric falls, indicating that readers were interested in the material specifics of these more accessible garments (figure 25).

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 27, 194

The 'Newtility' Look

by PATRICIA LENNARD

HOW far has the New Look spread through the fashion trade?

Higher-priced clothes are acquiring touches of fairly authentic detail, but you will not be seeing the main results until about February. Look out then for tortoiseshell buttons (Dior-inspired, from Paris) and smoked pearl studs that unscrew for cleaning, on your spring dresses.

Look out for fine woollens and crepes in pastels (the Royal South African tour was a direct inspiration): the lightest possible grey, dusty rose, dusty blue, and "food" shades of yellow—butter, honey, banana, melon.

Look out for false hips of buckram (£1 a pair), canvas frills sewn under the waistline, boned hip seams and padded pockets for hip fullness.

But, so far, utility spring clothes are only slightly affected by the Great Change. Hems have been let down a couple of inches, "spiv" shoulder pads replaced by new plastic sponge pads for a rounder shoulder line and hip emphasis given by canvas stiffened basques or peg-top drapery. But they still look like the casual dirndl or shirt-waister styles we have been wearing in the past and will continue to wear in the future.

* * *

Sigrid has sketched a Harella utility coat (extreme left), about £8, which makes concessions to the New Look with a rounded shoulder yoke and wide skirt springing from a slim waistline. And right, are two examples of the middle course utility styling must take. The utility oyster satin blouse by Hart, about £4, incorporates a rounded shoulder line because of its capsleeve, and back-fastening high-necked blouses have been a firm favourite across the Atlantic. The Windsmoor utility skirt —it will be about 45s. to 50s.—is a practical version of the bubble skirt with peg-top fullness below the waist. It buttons all the way through, invisibly, under the front placket.

Figure 25:
'The Newtility Look'. *Evening Standard*, 27 November 1947.

As the spring progressed, another meaning began to creep into the way some sectors of the press used the phrase 'New Look'. It described something undesirable and in opposition to the kinds of fashion most people wanted to wear day-to-day.[60] Columnists reminded readers that the New Look was 'Difficult unless you have a good figure', and the disappearance of knee-length skirts was treated with nostalgia and gently mocking regret in headlines including 'A Last Look At The Old Look'.[61] In one article, the *Daily Mail* goes so far as to explain that in some areas women are requesting to have their new skirts shortened because 'women are laughed at if they wear the new look'.[62] Finally, by the late spring of 1948, only a few short months after

[59] *Daily Mail*, 27 February 1948.
[60] The *Leach-Way Fashions Magazine* from spring 1948 features a page of designs entitled 'A Simpler New Look', which are described variously as 'flattering', 'smart' and, most importantly, 'simple'.
[61] *Daily Telegraph*, 5 February 1948; *Daily Mail*, 29 March 1948.
[62] *Daily Mail*, 18 March 1948.

it had first appeared, the name began to fall out of use.[63] As a Miss Norah Alexander wrote in to the letters page of the *Daily Mail*: 'The longer skirt is here, let's face it […] In America, they've dropped the 'New'. They rightly call it 'The Look''.[64]

Spring 1948: enter the London Look

As the 'New Look' ceased to be new, the press sought other descriptors to express the styles unveiled by designers in spring 1948. The majority settled on naming the London collections the 'London Look'. Published press images show that this style was distinct from the fashions that Dior had produced a year earlier; rather than Dior's unnaturally sculpted structures, the roundness of the hips was achieved by seaming at the waist, and skirt fullness derived not from yards of fabric but from pleating (figure 26). Perhaps most characteristically, the shoulders were distinctly more square, nodding to traditions of British tailoring.

Figure 26:

Matita outfit, featuring the characteristic full skirt and square shoulders of the London Look. *The Maker-Up*, July 1948, 29.

[63] As early as 10 January 1948, the *Daily Graphic* declared 'The New Look is now just an old look'.
[64] *Daily Mail*, 13 March 1948.

Although the 'London Look' is often cited as a British response to the New Look, analysis of the London press from this time demonstrates that this trend was not a copy or compromise, but the product of stylistic features that had been developed by London designers over a number of years.[65] *Harper's Bazaar* first introduced the arrival of a version of the 'London Line' in its April 1946 edition.[66] Moving forward, British designers were excited to talk about the progression of this line in coverage of their spring 1947 shows, when Victor Stiebel even went so far as to claim that these lines proved London fashions were 'on the edge of the most interesting fashion developments of the last half century.'[67] Looking at editorials and adverts for ready-to-wear fashion, the influence of London designers and their lines on British fashion is clearly evident throughout 1947 and 1948 (figure 27), demonstrating that the London Look was not simply a media phenomenon, but one that permeated the depths of London's fashion industry.

Figure 27:

Linzi dresses with the plunging necklines and peplums featured by IncSoc members Stiebel and Hartnell in their autumn 1947 collections. *The Maker-Up*, January 1948, 23.

[65] Ehrman, 'Broken Traditions', 112.
[66] *Harper's Bazaar*, April 1946, 25.
[67] *Observer*, 2 February 1947.

The fact that the London Look is barely remembered as a footnote in fashion histories today is no fault of the London press, who provided consistent publicity for the city's clothing industry throughout the late 1940s. Frequent newspaper reports on London's export collections boasted of their good design as well as on the quality of their workmanship. Both *Vogue* and *Harper's Bazaar* dedicated full issues to the London collections, equivalent to their Paris coverage, and many newspapers frequently commented on developments in London fashions. In September 1946, *Harper's Bazaar* went so far as to claim that 'the world's most distinguished buyers switched their gaze to London. […] For London Couturiers are making better clothes than they've ever made before.'[68] However, this focus on export gives a potential clue as to why the creativity of post-war British fashion design between 1945 and 1947 is often overlooked. As Settle notes in her praise for one export collection, the models on show are prototypes that the Board of Trade did not allow to be made up in any great numbers, making it likely that 'what is shown here will have passed out of current fashion before it can be made'.[69]

Defining the New Look in London

If the ubiquitous usage of Willy Maywald's infamous photograph of Dior's 'Bar Suit' has codified a very specific illustration of the New Look in books and exhibitions of fashion history, it is worth noting that the 'London Look' has no direct analog. The continued privileging of Maywald's image defines a New Look garment precisely as one that featured rounded, sloping shoulders, narrow lapels, short jackets with extremely narrow, corseted waists emphasised by padded hips and a very full skirt of mid-calf length. However, the popular use of this image fixes the fashion in a single place and time, without considering how the New Look evolved to exist beyond Paris, and how it was adapted to account for varying material costs and physical practicalities. Reviewing the London press between 1946 and 1949 offers evidence of a plurality to trend that came to be known as the New Look, showing how it evolved over time to cater to different demographics in ways distinct from Dior's influence. By surveying text and image together, the popular portrayal of the New Look as a

[68] *Harper's Bazaar*, September 1946, 23. Alison Settle went further in February 1947 by suggesting that the quality of British tailoring could be impairing export potential in terms of licensing, reporting that an American buyer for chain stores complained 'Your tailoring is too good: we cannot copy these talented lines'. *Observer*, 2 February 1947.
[69] *Observer*, 18 February 1946.

fixed aesthetic is squarely challenged; these materials highlight that many of the descriptions used to discuss the trend—such as 'feminine'—are both subjective and capable of deriving meaning only relative to other trends. For example, what was meant by a 'defined' waist, 'soft' shoulder line, 'short jacket', 'emphasised hip line', or 'longer' and 'fuller' skirt very much depended on the fashions that had gone before, and images from the 1940s show that the meaning of these words changed over time, making it hard to define the specific physical features that characterised the New Look.

Figure 28:

'Limelight on London' feature, describing the 'tiny waist, fuller hips' of the new season's collections. *Harper's Bazaar*, March 1946, 32.

Although the arrival of the New Look is usually set as 1947, the earliest stylistic changes typically associated with the new trend in London were the arrival of more 'fluid' shoulders and a 'greyhound' waist in the autumn of 1946.[70] Skirt lengths also began to drop, and following the London export collections that season, Alison Settle

[70] *Observer*, 4 August 1946. However, it is important to remember that characterization of this shoulder line as 'fluid' would have been relative to the extreme square shoulders of post-war Paris lines. See, for example, *Evening Standard*, 7 January 1946. For discussion of 'greyhound' waistline, see *Evening Standard*, 14 June 1946.

informed her readers that 'It is goodbye to the sight of knees', as suit skirts grew two inches longer and dress lengths reached 13 inches from the ground.[71] The new style was described in relation to a range of historical influences, most vividly by *Tatler's* Jean Lorimer who illustrated how fashion had found inspiration in the nineteenth century by comparing images of couture collections and examples of historical costumes in film, helping readers relate new fashions to clothes they had already encountered on-screen.[72] This change in London fashions was significant enough to make an international impact, with one report in the American *Journal of Retailing* informing readers that 'The London couture has made great progress since being thrown out on its own […] The London line has lost its austerity and a new London silhouette has been created, one that is softer, rounder and more seductive.'[73]

Figure 29:

Cover image showing the 'New London Line'. *Harper's Bazaar*, April 1946.

[71] *Observer*, 4 August 1946.
[72] The *Daily Graphic* describes new fashions as looking 'Back to 1910' on 18 October 1946, whereas other sources make reference to the 1840s, a full century earlier. Jean Lorimer's piece appeared in *The Tatler and Bystander*, 30 January 1946, 150.
[73] Nemerov, 'The Future of Paris and World Markets', 96.

Figure 30:

Horrockses Fashions with full skirts. *Evening Standard*, 3 April 1946.

These changes in high-end fashion styles are reported in tandem with similar trends in ready-to-wear.[74] Dresses by Horrockses Fashions showed full, pleated skirts from spring 1946 (Figure 30), and London Utility models released that year had 'generous lines' and 'full swing skirts.'[75] The real-life effects of these changing trends is visible elsewhere in the papers. The impact of the new waistline can be seen in a rise in adverts for undergarments such as a 'corselet waist' sold at Fenwicks, and photographs of Wimbledon spectators show a proliferation of summer dresses with full, pleated skirts.[76] The presence of these adverts alongside illustrated new ready-to-wear styles indicates that these changing fashions were not just something that

[74] However, the changes are most apparent in media targeting a wealthy and fashion-conscious minority. First to be listed in *Tatler*'s February 1946 'Spring Fashion Forecast' is 'PADDED HIPS', capitalised and demonstrated in a Dorville ready-to-wear suit, available from Harvey Nichols. *The Tatler and Bystander*, 13 February 1946, 218. The society magazine also shows examples of women wearing the new trends, including a photograph of the wedding of Mr Bernard Delfont to Carole Lynne in May Fair, where the bride is wearing a softly tailored jacket with a defined waist and peplum, emphasising the hips. *The Tatler and Bystander*, 6 February 1946, 167.
[75] *Evening Standard*, 3 April 1946; *Evening Standard*, 31 May 1946.
[76] *Daily Graphic*, 30 September 1946; *Daily Graphic*, 25 June 1946.

Londoners were reading about—they were something they were materially experiencing in their day-to-day lives.

Figure 31:
Illustrations of new autumn fashions for 1947, showing gently softer shoulders, rounded hips and narrow waistlines. *Daily Mail*, 25 July 1947.

Full skirts were all the rage in evening wear throughout the autumn and winter of that year, with Norman Hartnell particularly praised for 'A white net crinoline dress […] measuring about 6ft across', although narrow skirts were still favoured for tailored daywear suits in London (figure 32).[77] This preference continued through the spring of 1947, when the big news story covered from the Paris collections was the hobble skirt.[78] Although there was acknowledgement of falling hemlines from those spring collections, the gradual changes seen in London fashions that spring continued along the same lines as those seen in the autumn 1946 collections, and press coverage remained more focused on the fuel crisis and its severe impact on garment production and clothing stocks than on new trends.[79] The general consensus by the summer was that mass-market British fashions were not dramatically changing, in spite of the new lines seen in the couture shows. Newspapers reported that women

[77] *Daily Graphic*, 14 October 1946; *Evening Standard*, 29 January 1946; *Daily Graphic*, 7 October 1946.
[78] *Evening Standard*, 14 March 1946.
[79] 'Clothes Hit By Crisis', *Daily Mail*, 5 April 1947.

were still primarily concerned with practicality in their clothing, buying up stocks of men's trousers to wear themselves while their skirts remained stubbornly short, hitting just below the knee.[80]

Figure 32:
Narrow tailored skirts. *Vogue*, September 1947, 41.

The earliest clear descriptions of how 1947 might bring further developments in London fashion trends arrived in the *Observer* in August 1947, when Alison Settle set out some of the differences between Paris fashion and the 'London Line'. She explained that London fashions were more casual, used more wool and featured 'well curved jacket lines but slim sleeves and skirt'.[81] The idea that fashions in London followed a simpler, more wearable aesthetic than that commonly described as New Look is evident in the majority of descriptions of new fashions from the autumn of 1947 through 1948, which generally focus on more defined (although not necessary corseted) waistlines and the growing length of jackets. These descriptions work to

[80] 'Women buy up trousers', *Daily Mail*, 9 July 1947. In the *Daily Mail* of 15 August 1947, fashion columnist Joya Begg reported that 'British women do not want skirts only 11in-13in from the ground'.
[81] *Observer*, 31 August 1947.

convey what these fashions would feel like to wear, over and above how the clothes look. For example, frequent references to pleats—both pressed and unpressed—indicate their particular important to London fashion at this time (figure 33), and notably are often framed in terms of comfort. In *Vogue*'s 1948 issue, pleats are praised for their ability to give fullness to skirts, particularly when combined with petticoats in order 'to give the wide skirted look without hip padding', thereby removing the discomfort and impracticality of cumbersome undergarments.[82]

Figure 33:
Suit with pleated skirt by Brenner Sports. *Vogue*, September 1947, 29.

These trends continued to evolve in scope and reach in London, meaning that, by the time the phrase 'New Look' had eventually permeated the national consciousness in 1948, it was used to indicate multiple different styles in both couture and ready-to-

[82] *Vogue*, March 1948, 40.

Figure 34:
Advert for 'New Look Pleating Service'. *Draper's Record*, 21 August 1948, 44.

wear collections.[83] Different publications featured different types of supposedly 'New Look' garments to cater for their various demographics, from the high-end fashions featured in *Vogue* to the cheaper ready-to-wear garments in *Woman's Weekly*. The materiality communicated by the images of these garments was similarly varied. Knowing that their readers would likely have a strong material understanding of highly structured tailored garments, magazines such as *Harper's Bazaar* photographed their models in static poses, showing how these well-made garments held their shape. In contrast, publications targeting a less affluent demographic understood that their readers were familiar with cheaper, unstructured garments.

[83] 'Gallup Polls, ministerial speeches and music hall jokes alike prove that the New Look catchword has penetrated British consciousness, even though daily life still shows few examples'. *Vogue*, March 1948, 37.

The illustrations of full-skirted fashions in *Woman's Weekly* always depicted a model in motion—usually walking or in mid-turn—in order to highlight how these unlined skirts, which hung limp when still, moved gracefully with the wearer's body when walking (figure 35).

Figure 35:
Woman's Weekly, 1 January 1, 1949, 13.

Press sources also show that London readers were becoming increasingly interested in the effects of different fabrics and cuts on creating home-sewn variations on the New Look. The *Daily Telegraph* offered New Look paper patterns in conjunction with *Vogue*, employing the same style of illustrations that the publication used for depicting couture fashion but with accompanying text that reassured readers concerned about excessive fabric quantities that the pattern shown was economical in its 'cloth saving feature' (figure 36). And for Londoners unable to afford either expensive *Vogue* patterns or large amounts of new fabric, *Woman's Weekly* suggested ways readers could lengthen their skirts using small amounts of cheaper

fabrics such as velveteen.[84] Although each of these examples relies on the ability to evoke the tactile feel of fabrics to appeal to readers, the material reality of these versions of the New Look would have been quite varied. These sources demonstrate that definitions of the New Look became increasingly broad as different demographics adapted and took ownership of the trend.[85] As the *Daily Graphic* reported of the explosion of styles seen in 1948, perhaps the only coherent definition of the New Look over a year after Dior's inaugural collection was that 'the squared look has given way for the rounded look'.[86] However, focusing on the feel of these new fashions, rather than strictly defining the look, enabled the press to appeal to broad readerships. By ensuring that people with varying access to new fashions were able to identify the clothes they presented under the banner of the New Look as exciting and up-do-date, but not out of reach, publications ensured the continuing interest of (and relevance to) their readers.

DAILY TELEGRAPH "VOGUE" PATTERN

NEW LOOK FOR THE HOME DRESSMAKER

Coat Or Dress From One Pattern

WITH the new silhouette of small waist, rounded shoulders and ballet skirt now firmly established in mass produced clothes in the fashion stores, it is the turn of the home dressmaker to try her skill at producing the "New Look."

As more material than we have been accustomed to use is needed for the longer, full skirt, this week's "Vogue" Pattern has been chosen because of its practical two-in-one fashion and cloth-saving feature. It may be worn as a button-through dress, for which it was originally designed, or as a summer coat.

Button-Through

Skirt is gored and gathered to bodice at waist. Sleeves are cut in one with front and back of bodice, allowing moderate fulness under the arm. Dress buttons from neck to hem and has narrow shawl collar. Sleeves are long and fitted or bracelet length.

Pattern is cut in bust sizes 30 to 38 inches. Size 34, long-sleeved, takes 2¾ yards of 54-inch material or 6¼ yards of 36-inch.

Send to Woman's Dept., Daily Telegraph, E.C.4, with 4s 7d for Pattern 8237. State size. Mark envelope "Pattern."

BY OUR DRESS EXPERT

Figure 36:

'New Look for the Home Dressmaker'. *Daily Telegraph*, 3 February 1948.

[84] *Woman's Weekly*, 24 January 1948, 96.
[85] Partington, 'Popular Fashion and Working Class Affluence', 145-161.
[86] *Daily Graphic*, 10 January 1948.

Figure 37:

Advert by London fashion brand Hershelle that proudly boasts of a London interpretation of 'The Look'. *Vogue*, April 1948, 25.

Local influences on an international trend

The timeline of London's press reaction to the New Look shows that this international trend was adapted, co-opted and shaped by a number of local influences in London. The crossover between the society pages and the fashion pages in publications such as *The Tatler and Bystander* indicates that London fashion was still subject to the influence of the British class system, featuring fashions suitable for attending upper class events such as hunting and horse racing. Even publications aimed at more general audiences, including newspapers such as the *Daily Mail* and *Daily Telegraph,* derived much of their fashion coverage from the royal family, with a particular focus on princesses Elizabeth and Margaret.[87] Importantly, this focus on dressing for

[87] On 3 December 1947, *Tatler* featured sketches showing the most 'outstanding fashions' worn at the royal wedding. *The Tatler and Bystander*, 3 December 1947, 296. 'Princess [Margaret] sets new teen-

traditional upper class pursuits reinforced the fashionable status of the tailored woolen suit, a staple of London's womenswear industry and an enormously important source of exports.[88] Incorporating London tailoring into the New Look gave the city's understanding of the trend a distinctive visual identity—but, more importantly, it allowed the trade press to give weight to London fashions above imported French or American clothes by connecting locally produced garments to the heritage of the city's tailoring industry.[89] The quality promised by associations with London tailoring can be seen in the way *The Maker-Up* illustrated an article that explicitly linked the creditability of London fashion to the traditional making skills present in the city (figure 38). This depicts London fashions using thick, heavy lines to mark the substantial nature of the well-defined tailored shoulders and solid seams stitched into these wool garments.

While the trade press and high-end fashion magazines focused on London's tailoring credentials, other press sources dedicated increased coverage to cheaper ready-to-wear garments. Rationing, austerity restrictions and the Utility scheme had increased the importance of mass-market British ready-to-wear, which in turn fueled an increased interest in ready-to-wear by the fashion press.[90] As a result, readers from a range of different publications were exposed to the latest fashion trends through a greater mix of couture and ready-to-wear than had been the norm before the war. In fashion magazines and newspapers (but especially in the latter), couture and high-end ready-to-wear sat side by side in fashion features, with images of both displayed with equal prominence. For example, in her *Observer* column, 'From A Woman's Viewpoint', Alison Settle regularly switched the garments she featured, between items of Parisian couture and English ready-to-wear, and described both in the same fashion-forward terms.[91] In June 1947, she featured a summer coat by the couturier

age styles'. *Evening Standard*, 17 February 1947. 'Fashions for the South African Tour', *Daily Telegraph*, 17 February 1947.

[88] Often even Hollywood stars were dressed to emulate the British upper classes in the press. On 2 September 1947, the *Evening Standard* ran a photograph of 'American film actress Peggy Moran' wearing 'the new longer skirt'.

[89] Alison Settle was an advocate of London tailoring as a source of substance for London fashions. 'The London dress designers have put on a superb show of tweed clothes at the International Wool Secretariat as an answer to the suggestion, much bandied about, that the New Look will kill the tweed trade'. *Observer*, 6 June 1948.

[90] Chapter four of this thesis elaborates further on the reasons behind this.

[91] The fact that Settle's columns are not accompanied by illustrations implies that readers were expected to understand the material differences between these different types of garments and, as such, only required written stylistic descriptions.

Lelong one week, advising the reader to take note of the 'nipped waist and widened hipline', and a ready-to-wear holiday suit by Brenner Sports two weeks later, which she praised for its 'curved lines and fabric contrast'.[92] Some weeks she even featured Utility garments.[93] Settle's columns demonstrate that London's ready-to-wear designers were not simply waiting to copy the couture coming out of either London and Paris, but were developing trends simultaneously and adding to the development of the New Look.[94] This press coverage makes it clear that Londoners did not experience the New Look as a trickle down trend imported from Paris, as is often suggested, but as a vibrant and evolving mix of local and international styles.

Figure 38:
'London Leads The World', featuring the work of IncSoc designers. *The Maker-Up*, September 1947, 154-155.

[92] *Observer*, 1 June 1947; *Observer*, 30 June 1947.
[93] *Observer*, 3 August 1947.
[94] This is also evident in adverts that feature alongside fashion pages, particularly in relation to London shops, which demonstrate how high-end ready-to-wear was building an important vision of what the New Look and London Look entailed.

At the same time, the traditions of London making were increasingly adapting to international influences. In particular, the growth of London's ready-to-wear industry strengthened the influence of American designers on the city's fashions. New imports of American 'teen age' fashions, characterised by their simple lines and full skirts that hit just below the knee, were of particular significance to the way London adapted the New Look. There are strong associations made in the press between American youth fashions and the nipped-in, but un-corseted, waist that dominated London versions of the New Look.[96] The length and shape of London New Look ready-to-wear styles, especially in summer dresses, are much closer to the examples of American garments than to the press reports of Paris trends (figure 39). In fact, the extent to which these London garments look to be influenced by prominent designers of the 'American Look' suggests that Londoners were more materially familiar with the types of fashions designed by figures such as Clare McCardell than they were with pieces from Dior.

London's fashion industry had a changeable relationship with Paris in the immediate post-war period. In January 1945, *The Maker-Up* ran an editorial discussing the 'British Influence on French Fashions,' which argued that the international status of British fashion had been elevated as a result of the war, and just a few months later the publication attacked rival French fashions as the products of poor quality fabrics.[97] However, by 1948 the same publication can be found taking a more international outlook, vocally praising the rebirth of Parisian couture, New York designers and the growing Italian fashion industry. Another influential trade publication, *The Tailor and Cutter,* even began to express disappointment in British style around this time, for example, discussing how the shortcomings of the London suits worn by distinctly unglamorous British actors made them appear 'as a pack of very dull ducks.'[98]

[96] *Tatler* featured an advert for 'Fifth Avenue American dress shop' on Regent Street. The dress shown is simple, reflecting overlap between wearability of the London Look and the American Look. *The Tatler and Bystander*, 16 June 1948, 347.
[97] *The Maker-Up*, January 1945, 16; *The Maker-Up*, April 1945, 175.
[98] 'We go to the actor's garden party', *The Tailor and Cutter*, 10 June 1949, 504.

Figure 39:

Dress from Dickens and Jones, showing influence of American fashions on London ready-to-wear. *Harper's Bazaar*, May 1949, 12.

Far from neglecting their duties as champions of British fashion, this shift in tone by the trade press indicates how seriously they took their responsibility to support the industry at this uncertain time by drawing on international success stories to inform businesses how best to rebuild and grow for the future. In contrast to the seller's market the industry had experienced during the war, British manufacturers and retailers were feeling increasingly squeezed as the decade drew to a close.[99] Trade publications waged campaigns against government regulations in order to rectify this situation, but they also sought to inspire British firms to improve their offerings by following international leads.[100] This inspirational approach was primarily directed

[99] A 1949 Mass Observation survey about attitudes towards clothes buying showed that between June 1948 and January 1949, the number of respondents who credited money shortage as being the primary obstruction to buying new clothes rose from 47 per cent. to 73 per cent. 'Present Day Cost of Living', 1949. Mass Observation, FR 3075.

[100] The *Maker-Up* campaigned for simplifications to government regulations controlling the rates of purchase tax levied on fashion goods, reminding readers that 'After such a long wait the home market deserves nice clothes'. *The Maker-Up*, January 1947, 23.

towards womenswear, and as such to the dominant trend of the New Look, due to the prevailing cultural narrative that women were naturally more interested in fashion, and so more eager consumers, than men. As the (male) chairman of the United Committee of Light Clothing declared at a luncheon; 'As we all know, women are slaves to fashion.'[101]

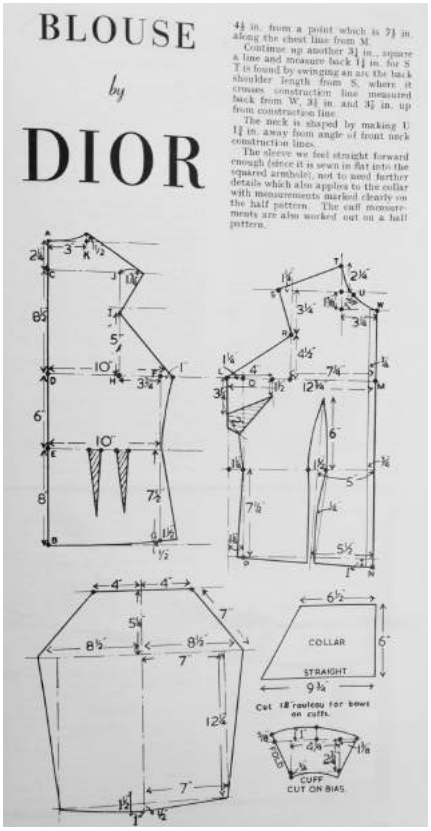


Figure 40:
Dior blouse pattern. *The Maker-Up*, October 1949, 243.

In these circumstances, the trade press turned to French designers, and particularly Dior, not for examples of designs to copy, but for lessons in how to market fashions. The *Maker-Up* praised Dior for his use of publicity and called for British manufacturers to note his move towards licensing his designs to ready-to-wear manufacturers, highlighting the importance of a prestigious name when selling mid-market

[101] 'The battle of the skirts', *The Maker-Up*, October 1947, 204.

fashions.[102] In 1949, the publication even featured a licensed Dior pattern as an example of how good pattern cutting can achieve dramatic looking results in ready-to-wear garments (figure 40).[103] By engaging their readers in the materiality of successful international fashions, the publication sought to boost the confidence of British makers. Once a Dior blouse was broken down into its component parts in the familiar form of flat pattern pieces, this French fashion was no longer intimidating to the trade readership, who were able to copy and make their own versions of this garment.

Although *The Maker-Up's* target audience was comprised of ready-to-wear manufacturers, the publication increasingly commented on couture designs in the immediate post-war years and encouraged readers to borrow from the cultural capital of both French and British high-end fashion design. In 1947, it introduced a regular feature entitled 'London Leads the World', a double-page spread in which it described the latest trends as featured in the work of IncSoc designers. This feature makes explicit links between the creative abilities of London's couturiers and the success of the British ready-to-wear industry, recognising that in order to produce mass market clothing with fashion appeal that would stimulate consumer demand, the ready-to-wear industry needed to draw on the credibility of high-end London fashion. This also explains why, at a time when manufacturing centres such as Leeds and Bradford were expanding, the *Maker-Up* increasingly focused its coverage of British fashion on London, a city with a long history of luxurious sartorial consumption and the central location of British couture and bespoke tailoring. This can be seen in its use of images of London landmarks in its 'Light on the Collections' feature, even as it highlighted the best ready-to-wear designs from companies across the country (figure 41). In some ways, the London trade press facilitated the mythology of Dior and the New Look by purposefully blurring the boundaries between London fashions and Parisian couture, but in doing so they may well have ensured the ongoing success of the trend described in this chapter as the London Look.

[102] 'Meeting American and Continental Competition', *The Maker-Up*, February 1947, 82-83.
[103] 'Blouse by Dior', *The Maker-Up*, October 1949, 243.

Figure 41:
'Light on the Collections'. *The Maker-Up*, July 1947, 30-31.

From the high to low ends of the industry, press sources show that the ability of London makers to mix influences and adapt fashions grew increasingly important due to the significant role that their export businesses needed to play at this time of austerity. This meant that London's fashion houses had to be reactive to international market demands as well as fashion forward in their own right. Readers of London newspapers and magazines would have been aware of these international influences due to the prominence given to reports on the technical and manufacturing side of the industry, even in the popular press. When the American export market pressed for longer skirt lengths from Britain in 1947, newspapers reported how this impacted fashions in the city, explaining that, when American stores specified 'skirts must not be more than thirteen inches from the ground', this influenced the line of fashion seen in the home market too.[104] In a post-war world, where the fragility of the economy demanded such a high level of collective sacrifice on a day-to-day basis, it is perhaps unsurprising that the press were writing for a readership who showed a deep interest in the business of fashion. But more than this, the technical language used by 1940s publications to accompany fashion spreads demonstrates that, unlike

[104] *Observer*, 3 August 1947.

fashion coverage today, publications expected their readership to be equipped with a high level of material knowledge about the construction and manufacture of clothing.

Reading the materiality of text and image

The story of the New Look has proven to be one of fashion's most enduring and appealing narratives, so much so that with the benefit of hindsight, in the wake of its telling, the triumphant post-war return of Paris as the fashion capital of the world seems almost inevitable. By deconstructing this mythology, this chapter creates space to explore London's position in this global hierarchy, and consider the contribution the city made to local, national and international fashions at this time. In doing so, it also reveals the absurdity of simplifying an international fashion trend to a single image or the vision of one man, reassigning credit from the popular trope of a 'genius' designer towards consideration of how fashion is shaped by the hidden networks of skilled workers and multiple segments of consumers, as well as the economic and political conditions in which they work and shop.[112]

Engaging in close analysis of the presentation of fashion in the London press enables this chapter to pull apart some of the popular narratives surrounding the New Look because it reveals how these were constructed by the power structures at play in London fashion at this time. But looking closely at how the details of the New Look, described by London media sources, imply a shared material understanding amongst their readership does more than simply destabilise the orthodoxies of 1940s fashion history—it reconsiders the role ordinary Londoners played in the development of post-war fashion trends. It shows that London shoppers were early adopters of the New Look's stylistic tenets, prior to Dior's global ascent, and that the city's retailers understood how to market this international trend to suit the material needs of its inhabitants. Reading this materiality in articles about home sewing, and more generally in the trade press, also highlights the creativity of London's amateur dressmakers and professional garment makers. These publications expected their

[112] Writers such as Marie France Pochna have dedicated entire volumes to his 'fairytale' career. Pochna, *Christian Dior*.

readers to possess the ability to re-interpret the materiality implied by the text and image they consumed in order to further adapt and evolve fashion trends.

This chapter's findings have implications for our understanding of the way Londoners perceived the relationship between fashion and the variety of influences and networks they negotiated in the city at this time of austerity, revealing that London readers were familiar with a wide range of international fashion trends and were aware of the fact that their purchases were local adaptations of these international fashions. Looking to press sources to understand how the New Look operated within London's fashionable networks highlights the importance of place specificity more generally, and demonstrates the need to look again at the overly simplified presentation of austerity fashion in popular history and culture, in which the 1940s are split decisively between the 'war years' and the 'new look'.

Nevertheless, the survey of press publications in this chapter also demonstrates the limits of using text and images to build new understandings of how fashion systems were shaped in the post-war city. Although the way this chapter considers fashion on the page places materiality at the centre of the story of the New Look in London, it is still limited to an understanding of the trend written by a small number of journalists and illustrators privy to international travel and privileged enough to receive press invitations to fashion shows. This chapter finds that, while analysis of images and texts can uncover power structures, it is often unable to recover the lost processes and voices which those stories concealed. As a result, the next chapter of this thesis takes a turn towards material objects and more than representational approaches in order to explore the make-up of London fashion in greater depth.

This chapter has, however, demonstrated how representational sources have much to add to our material understanding of fashion. The broader definitions that this chapter has found to describe the fashion trends that emerged in womenswear between 1946 and 1949 show that our understanding of what counts as a 'New Look' fashion in museum collections should include a much wider variety of garments in different styles. The variety of press descriptions that are used to describe the trend at different times confirm that a number of very different outfits held in the Museum of London's fashion collection are, in different ways, examples of the New Look. This has particularly important implications for the way we approach one particular set of

'New Look' style garments in the Museum's collection (Figure 42). This particular set of garments span the period 1945 to 1950, and they are diverse in both their styles and their origins. Each was donated in 1967 in response to a call from the Museum for members of the public to come forward with examples of 'New Look' style garments. From a recognisably 'New Look' Hardy Amies coat dress to a Utility coat updated to suit changing styles, these garments are united less by common design features than by how they were perceived by the individuals who owned them, demonstrating that the New Look was as much a state of mind—an excitement for change and renewal in the post-war city—as it ever was a coherent or consistent set of stylistic trends. Looking at the diversity of these material objects starts to reveal something the press sources could not—the networks that connected manufacturers, retailers and consumers. These connections offer a different perspective on experiences of fashion at a time of austerity, particularly with regards to the importance of personal expression through accessible ready-to-wear, and they begin to suggest how fashion shaped the post-war city.

Figure 42:

'New Look' dresses, L-R: skirt and jacket in printed 'spot' fabric, 67.108/2; printed pink cotton sundress, 67.41; black Rayon dress with coloured flowers, 67.39; grey wool coat, 67.49. Museum of London.

Archival encounter no. 4:

64.128: Utility dress in brown, cream and green checked wool, purchased from Huppert's of Regent Street in 1948

Figure 43:

Huppert dress in checked wool, 1948. Museum of London, 64.128.

It is November 2013, and I am carrying a garment bag down from the mezzanine level of the Museum store. Inside the bag is a Utility dress in green and brown wool check, and I am surprised by the burden of its heavy weight. But wool is not just heavy—it is also warm and durable, indicating the bodily demands this garment was expected to fulfill. Looking closer at this garment also demonstrates that its post-war wearer required clothes suitable for an active body. In an elegant adaptation of the New Look style, its full skirt is created with gathered tucks at the waist, rather than yards of cumbersome fabric. Its sleeves also use gathered fabric to create squarer shoulders that allow much greater freedom of arm movement than the narrow, sloping shoulders of Parisian couture. Most crucially, the bodice front (unlike the rest of the garment) is cut on the bias, which allows the woven fabric to have considerably more stretch, fitting comfortably around the contours of the torso with minimal construction. Not only this, but the cut tilts the checked pattern of the fabric at a 45-degree angle, directing the gaze down the points of the diamond pattern in order to emphasise the narrowing of the torso at the waist, and subsequent widening at the hips where the checks once again run horizontally. This effective pattern cutting creates the impression of a fashionable hourglass silhouette without the need for restrictive shaping undergarments that would be difficult to wear while leading an active life—be it in a workshop, office or domestic environment.

The strenuous nature of the bodily demands placed upon this particular dress can be seen in its marks of wear. The expense and style of the dress, which was bought in 1948 from Hupperts—a high end ready-to-wear retailer on Regent Street in London—indicate that it was purchased as smart-casual wear by someone with an above average income.[1] As such, it is unlikely that it was subject to particularly rough use in the form of manual labour. And yet, the dress still shows signs of extensive wear, in particular with rips at the

[1] Hupperts is cited in Elizabeth Jane Howard's wartime novel *Confusion* as the site of desirable but unaffordable woolen and knitted fashions. Howard, *Confusion,* 77. At the time of purchase, the dress came accessorized with a black patent leather belt and a narrow velvet ribbon bow to sit under the collar, further implying the quality of the garment.

waistband and the hem. These tears appear to have resulted from a combination of the structural weaknesses caused by the heaviness of the garment pulling at the woven fabric and by vigorous movement. In particular, the damage to the hem looks like it was caused by a violent ripping rather than slow wear over time, and the fabric was most likely torn after getting caught on a static object while the wearer was moving with some speed. To mend this wear-and-tear, patches have been sewn into the underside of the garment by machine. Curiously for a high-quality item, very little care has been taken to minimise the appearance of the patches, as can be seen from the long rows of brown stitching that extend above the damaged areas on the outside of the garment. These are irregular and densely packed, implying that it was the strength of the mend rather than its appearance afterwards that was of prime concern to the mender.

Figure 44:

Waistband detail of Huppert dress, showing mend. Museum of London, 64.128.

Figure 45:

Simpson advert. *Harper's Bazaar*, October 1945, 20.

Four:

Making austerity fashion

Figure 46:

View from St. Paul's Cathedral to the east, showing the devastation caused to the fashion wholesale businesses based around St. Paul's Churchyard. Arthur Cross, 1945. Museum of London, IN7073.

Looking east from St Paul's Cathedral as the Second World War drew to a close, documentary photographer Arthur Cross unwittingly captured an image of change in London's fashion industry (figure 46). Stretching out in front of him lay the remains of St Paul's Churchyard, which up until 1939 was home to many of London's most important textile and garment wholesalers but had been reduced to a series of foundational footprints by five years of aerial bombardment. Cross's photograph offers a striking visual sense of the disruption caused to London fashion by the war, and an idea of the enormous challenge faced by London firms wanting to reconstruct competitive businesses in a radically altered city and under new economic circumstances. The processes by which London made fashion were changed by the impact of enemy action and the government policies that resulted from the conflict, and the extent of the ruins pictured by Cross encapsulates the impossibility of returning to old ways and old orders for the city's fashion industry.

This sense of a lost fashion culture is a thread that runs through 1940s fashion consciousness, and it can still be found today subtly connecting the disparate archival and literary sources that speak for the remains of a fragmented industry trying to make sense of what it had lost and where it could go next. Fashion historians have considered how the troubling and sublime beauty of London's ruins provided an image of hope for the fashion industry, as seen in the photographs of couture clad models amid bombed out buildings that Cecil Beaton and Clifford Coffin shot for *Vogue*, clearly implying the phoenix-like role the magazine saw that fashion had to play in the city's reconstruction.[1] Yet the proliferation of these types of visual sources in discussions of London fashion make it hard to understand with adequate sincerity how the industry's processes were changing to adapt to the new post-war situation, as their peaceful aestheticism obscures the unsightly, everyday business of actually making clothes.[2] Instead, this chapter considers how bringing together a broader array of diverse archival and material sources can help us better synthesise and understand how the influences of government austerity policies, war damage, businesses decisions and the choices made by individual workers changed how

[1] Arnold, 'Fashion in Ruins: Photography, Luxury and Dereliction in 1940s London', 359.

[2] In their rush to announce the rebirth of London fashion, fashion and trade magazines sidelined the city's heritage as a centre for fashion production. By juxtaposing couture fashions with bombsites, these publications implied that cultural ownership and future rights to London's ruined fashion spaces—including the bombed factories and workrooms—lay with artists, designers and tastemakers, not machinists, tailors or pressers. See Wilcox, *The Golden Age of Couture*.

fashion was made in the post-war city. Through this approach, it redraws the map of fashionable London at this time and reveals how changes to the processes and the physical spaces of the city reshaped the symbolic meaning of London fashion.

Close looking at the details of how London-made material objects were designed, cut, stitched and finished is particularly key to this chapter. Considering objects as processes—shaped by the hands they have passed through—draws out connections between different parts of the city's fashion networks. But often, telling the hidden stories of these objects is only made possible by contextualising them in a range of other archival sources; provenance alone can be inadequate for a number of reasons. The products of London's fashion industry during the post-war period were rarely the output of a single location, process or maker, and companies who relied on their reputations and symbolic associations with certain systems and places often had much to gain by concealing the processes by which their clothes were really made. In the face of misleading advertising and claims on garment labels, those searching for traces of garment production in the story of the reconstruction of London's post-war fashion industry are left to dig down through the archives in order to glimpse what happened to the unsightly business of making amidst these quiet and picturesque ruins.

The scale of the Second World War's impact on London's manufacturing industry is apparent in the archive at both micro and macro levels, from the individual stories of bombed out businesses, glimpsed in the small ads at the back of 1945 issues of *Draper's Record,* to the sobering Census returns, which show that the number of garment workers recorded in Stepney fell from 30,282 in 1931 to just 9,535 in 1951.[3] In this ruined landscape, even literary sources contain a palpable sense of a vanishing making culture, with the heroine of Rose Macaulay's 1950 novel *The World My Wilderness* choosing the surreal setting of a bombed out tailor's shop in Falcon Square, adjacent to a section of London's medieval city wall, in which to find refuge from the post-war city. Amid its bracken, bramble and 'torn fragments of mackintosh' she laments its demise with a nostalgic understanding that it represents an ancient tradition of making that has been irretrievably lost in this place.[4] Bringing these

[3] General Register Office*, Census 1951: Classifications of Occupations*, Table 20.
[4] Macaulay, *The World My Wilderness*, 71.

fragmentary sources together helps us see how the small details of individual making processes added up to make markedly significant alterations to the structure of the fashion city.

This chapter creates a fuller understanding of the dynamics of London's fashion industry at this time by investigating how austerity interacted with garment-making processes to permanently reshape the geographies and cultures of fashionable making in the city. By looking to understand the impact of austerity through methods of garment-production in the city, this chapter casts light on an aspect of London's fashion cultures that is often overlooked. Fashion cultures are most commonly considered in relation to the consumption of physical goods, experiences and representations rather than their production.[5] This is in spite of compelling evidence to suggest that dividing production and consumption into separate areas of study limits our ability to understand the extent of their social and cultural roles.[6] Making processes are missed because the story of London fashion is told primarily through either written sources or images, which divide fashion histories into these discrete studies of either production or consumption. The business of design and promotion is commonly studied through highly visual sources—such as sketches, photographs and adverts—and the attractive nature of this material privileges research in this area. In contrast, sources relating to garment manufacture, which tend to be dominated by numerically heavy business records, are usually kept outside of design archives, meaning they are often overlooked in studies of design history. Building from the premise that fashion objects can be studied as material processes, this chapter demonstrates what can be gained from making connections across archives and, in doing so, provides a framework through which to connect disparate archival sources.[7] This is especially useful when studying the complexity of a city such as London as it allows this chapter to explore the different and sometimes contradictory approaches taken across different sections of the industry in response to austerity.

[5] See Edwards, 'Shaping the Fashion City'; Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure*.
[6] du Gay, et al, *Doing Cultural Studies*.
[7] The methodology for this chapter draws on Christopher Breward's work to understand how the different locations and workings of the industry's 'back' and 'front' room activities interacted to contribute to the West End's fashionable reputation in the 1960s. Breward, 'Fashion's Front and Back', 15-40. Although scholars such as Christopher Breward have highlighted the need to consider the relationship between the 'front' and 'back' room activities of fashion houses, such studies rarely incorporate material objects and so leave room to build a more complete picture of the processes by which fashion is made.

The chapter begins by mapping the changing geographies of fashion production using government data, which establishes grounds to challenge the prevailing understanding that London's fashion industry, in reestablishing itself after the war, concentrated in the West End. By re-drawing the physical map of London fashion, this section articulates the extent of post-war changes to the city's industry in a new way, raising questions about the impact of austerity on London fashion that are not adequately considered in histories on the subject. In order to further explore the impact of austerity policies and conditions, the chapter then takes a material turn. It brings together a mixture of extant material objects produced in London and archival sources—including trade union records, the fashion trade press and material from business archives—to trace how post-war austerity reconfigured fashionable making processes in the city. Some of the objects discussed contain evidence of the damage that austerity policies caused to London's garment industry, while others reveal how the city's fashion businesses adapted their making processes to these new conditions. Looking closely at these objects details a new understanding of how fashion was produced in London in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War—one which reframes the city's post-war fashion narrative in the context of rapid change, represented through shifting trends in mass production and everyday dress. Finally, the chapter considers the long-term impacts of the changes austerity wrought on garment manufacture and London fashion. It notes the influence that the immediate post-war period had over the trajectory of London fashion, from the systems for fashion education in the city to the status of garment workers in the contemporary globalised fashion industry.

Mapping the changing geographies of London Fashion in the 1940s

The disruption caused by the war radically changed the geographies of London's fashion industry, with far-reaching consequences for the city's future relationship with fashion. With the arrival of peace, the companies that had survived the loss of their premises, stocks and staff were challenged to begin the process of reconstruction. Many companies chose to relocate due to the difficulties of rebuilding, triggering what has been described by fashion historians as a shift in the

geographies of London fashion from East to West End.[8] This is generally attributed to the scale of damage inflicted on the City and East End, as can be seen in the compensation claims submitted for stock and machinery damage by London textile and garment businesses as a result of bombing, while the West End escaped the blitz comparatively lightly damaged.[9]

The narrative that discusses the movement of the city's garment-making industry from East to West celebrates the rise of a new creative energy in London fashion that is firmly rooted in a West End location. The formation of trade organisations, such as the Incorporated Society of London Fashion Designers (IncSoc) in 1942 and the London Model House Group (LMHG) in 1946, are seen as markers of London's rising status as a fashion capital. The fortunes of these groups and the fashionable reputation of London's West End became intertwined, as the area became the key location in which these groups concentrated their efforts to promote London fashion on an international stage, notably through coordinated fashion and trade shows.[10]

Much of the evidence for this creative rise of the fashionable West End comes from the distinctly partial London fashion and trade press, whose enthusiasm for home-grown fashions in the early post-war years seem to derive primarily from an understanding that promoting British fashion for export was a patriotic duty at a time of economic difficulty. The post-war return of Paris as a global trend-setter after liberation created an even greater imperative to depict London as a valid competitor.[11] *Vogue* unveiled its first ever issue specifically dedicated to the export collections of London designers in March 1946, giving its readers a tantalising glimpse of fashions they could not purchase but which nevertheless 'lifted the spirits' with promise of future glory for London designers.[12] *Vogue*'s actions were enabled by IncSoc's coordination of London's couture shows in 1946. This meant that all major London couturiers showed in the same week for the first time, creating a new

[8] Breward, 'Fashion's Front and Back', 21.
[9] The total compensation claim from London's garment industry amounted to £100 million. However, these are disproportionately concentrated in the East, with the claims incurred by a single bombing raid on the wholesale textile district of the City on 29 December 1940 totaling £18 million. *Draper's Record*, 5 January 1946, 50. Note: for context, these amounts would be approximately £3.8 billion and £691 million, respectively, as adjusted for inflation.
[10] Tregenza, *London before it swung*.
[11] See Veillon, *Fashion Under the Occupation*; Arnold, *The American Look*.
[12] 'Collections by London Couturiers', *Vogue*, March 1946, 19.

publication opportunity that positioned London as a direct competitor to Paris, whose couture collection had long been the subject of biannual editions of the magazine. Through the press attention created by coordinating their spring 1946 shows, IncSoc's members laid a new claim to the ownership of 'London' fashion, ensuring that it was their designs, shown in their West End houses, that appeared under headlines about London. Understanding the marketing potential of this mantle, the garment industry trade press followed suit; and from 1946 *The Maker-Up* replaced some of its articles on garment production with large illustrated features of the latest designs by IncSoc members articulating a wider understanding that, for London fashion to succeed in the new post-war world, London needed to become synonymous with high-end, West End design.[13]

Missing from the story of post-war London fashion, as told through the vested interests of fashion organisations and the trade press, is a comprehensive discussion about how the city was producing the clothes designed and promoted in the West End and beyond. Many London firms felt excluded by the promotional activities of IncSoc and LMHG, complaining that the narrow focus of the biannual 'Fashion Fortnight' organised by the two groups failed to represent many of London's leading manufacturers.[14] This rift is indicative of an increasing divide between the fashion activities of the West End and elsewhere in the city. Further, it challenges the prevailing focus in studies of post-war London Fashion on the sites and outputs of the West End, demanding further investigation of a broader range of producers to understand exactly how the map of London fashion production was being redrawn.[15]

Concentration, suburban growth and the rise of the mass-produced ready-to-wear

Looking at alternate sources, including data from the Census, the Board of Trade's *Censuses of Production* as well as the listings of garment industry businesses in *Kelly's Post Office London Directories*, presents a starkly different and more nuanced picture of a shifting distribution of the garment workers and factories within London, as well

[13] The extent to which the press enthusiasm accurately reflects the global reception of British fashion at this time is called into question by the continued dominance of Parisian designs in American stores, both in licensed and copied versions.
[14] *Draper's Record*, 26 June 1948, 22.
[15] This divide is also seen in union activities. Members of the NUTGW set up a new West End branch in 1950, much to the irritation of the City branch. Hackney Archives. NUTGW Executive Board Minutes, D/S/24/3/9.

as the city's changing output and wider national significance in the British fashion industry. They reveal something of the complex relationship between London's economy and its fashionable geographies and suggest how the Second World War fused with longer term trends in the fashion industry, with negative consequences for fashion production in London. Together these sources clearly demonstrate that the 1940s witnessed a re-alignment of garment workers and factories, changes in the type of products being made in London, and the overall diminishing national importance of London as a production centre for fashion.

Headline figures for London's post-war fashion industry look healthy. The 1948 *Census of Production*—the first one of its kind conducted since 1935—shows that London still dominated the landscape of British fashion, with 39.6 per cent. of the nation's garment-making establishments located in the city, which produced 34.9 per cent. of national gross output. When London's figures are compared to the 1935 and 1931 *Censuses of Production*, however, a picture emerges of the diminishing importance of London-based making in a national context. The city's share of the total U.K. garment industry fell between 1935 and 1948 by all measures (Table 1), but most notably in terms of output, indicating that while London lost a significant number of jobs and businesses during the war, it proportionately lost an even larger share of the U.K. garment industry.

Table 1: London's percentage share of the U.K. garment industry

	1935	1945
Establishments	44.9%	39.6%
People employed	35.5%	28.1%
Gross output.....	43.1%	34.9%

Table 1:

Source: Board of Trade, *Final report on the Fifth Census of Production for 1935*, Table IV and *Final report on the Census of Production for 1948*, Table 5.

Census of Production data provides further clues as to why this was the case. Throughout the inter-war period, London's fashion industry had focused on high-end garment production, most notably specialising in retail bespoke tailoring and dressmaking, where a customer would order bespoke or made to measure items from

an individual tailor, dressmaker or shop workroom, which could at that time be found in most of London's major department stores. In 1935, London accounted for 60.3 per cent. of the U.K.'s gross output of retail bespoke tailoring and dressmaking, but only 48.7 per cent. of the nation's gross output in wholesale tailoring and dressmaking.[16] Although London had much to be positive about in the 1935 *Census of Production*—compared to 1930, its garment industry was growing and increasingly profitable—the figures conceal a warning for the city in the face of a changing fashion industry, where ready-to-wear clothes were overtaking bespoke and made to measure in popularity. Nationally, gross output from wholesale tailoring and dressmaking had increased by 10.6 per cent. from 1930 to 1935, broadly matching a decline of 9.5 per cent. in bespoke output nationwide, a trend that posed a clear threat to the core of London's garment-manufacturing industry. In addition to this, the growth in London's output between 1930 and 1935 was considerably lower than the number of new firms, indicating that many of these were not particularly productive, making them especially vulnerable to the difficulties of wartime conditions.

This shift towards mass-production continued after the war and reverberates throughout Census employment and manufacturing data from the period, with particularly stark impacts in London. For example, between 1935 and 1948, the number of people employed in retail bespoke garment-making across the U.K. fell by 47.8 per cent. (Table 2) and the amount spent on making-up and alterations in shop workrooms reduced dramatically between 1935 and 1948 in real terms. This marked decrease also suggests a rapid growth in mass manufacture that must have hit the city particularly hard during a period of widespread deskilling in the garment trade. The effect of these changes would have been most apparent for manufacturers of womenswear. The interwar growth of multiple tailors such as Burtons had already drawn a large amount of menswear manufacturing away from London and meant that government regulation had a less significant impact on British menswear as a whole.[17] The increasing importance of mass-manufacture wholesale menswear in the

[16] Board of Trade, *Final Report on the Fifth Census of Production 1935*, 406.

[17] Burtons were pioneers of production-line manufacturing. In 1921, they opened what was, at the time of opening, the largest clothing factory in Europe and expanded their Leeds-based production capacity considerably in 1934 when they moved to a larger, state-of-art factory. This new factory

1930s was not, however, matched in womenswear, where the growth of smaller scale retail and wholesale bespoke production outpaced its mass-produced counterparts in the build-up to the Second World War.[18]

Womenswear fashions shifted quickly during the immediate post-war period, with a rapid move towards making more simply constructed garments, exemplified by a rise in the importance of dressmaking to wholesalers: in 1948, wholesalers were making 46.4 per cent. more dresses and blouses than more labor- and skill-intensive tailored items.[19] In spite of these changes, data from London shows a failure to quickly adapt to these trends and that the city did not followed the mass market route of much of the rest of the country. The 1951 Census shows that Greater London was still trying to rely on more traditional and higher skill manufacturing methods. Although the city remained dominant in the fields of dressmaking and light clothing manufacture, making up 36.14 per cent. of all workers in this specialism, its businesses show an unusually high number of pressers.[20] Pressers were some of the most expensive skilled employees in garment-making, suggesting that the city was failing to keep pace with changes and continuing to produce high-end garments in the face of the growing mass-market ready-to-wear industry nationally, losing a significant part of its market share as a result.

Table 2: U.K. garment industry

	Number of establishments			Persons employed		
	1935	**1948**	**1935-48 % change**	**1935**	**1948**	**1935-48 % change**
Wholesale tailoring and dressmaking	1,521	1,858	22.2%	142,178	172,641	22.1%
Retail bespoke tailoring and dressmaking	967	509	-4.7%	28,168	14,701	-7.8%

contained conveyor belt production units and the latest machinery, adapted to each different phase of tailoring. Sigsworth, *Montague Burton*. 54-57; Honeyman, 'Montague Burton Ltd', 203-204.

[18] The *Census of Production* for 1935 shows that while wholesale tailoring for menswear grew by 15.39 per cent. between 1930 and 1935, its womenswear equivalent only grew by 6.79 per cent. During this same period, manufacturing figures for retail bespoke menswear fell while womenswear grew. Board of Trade, *Final Report on the Fifth Census of Production 1935,* 406.

[19] 81.8 per cent. of these dresses were made of either silk, Rayon or Nylon (rather than wool or a wool mix), indicating these were likely cheaper, mass-produced items that did not require the capabilities or skillsets of large numbers of expensive employees.

[20] General Register Office*, Census 1951: Classifications of Occupations,* Table 20.

Table 2: U.K. garment industry

	Number of establishments			Persons employed		
	1935	1948	1935-48 % change	1935	1948	1935-48 % change

Table 2:

Source: Board of Trade, *Final Report on the Census of Production for 1948*, Table 8.

The distribution of garment workers and factories within London itself also changed during this period. In 1951, Greater London was home to 30.8 per cent. of all garment workers in England and Wales.[21] While it is clear that the garment industry still employed many Londoners, the relative decline in the city's industry is put into sharp relief when the 1951 Census is compared to its predecessor in 1931.[22] Over a twenty-year period, the number of people employed in the garment industry in London almost halved from 194,384 to 98,108. The breakdown of these total figures, borough by borough, shows that this decline was far from uniformly distributed across the city (Table 3).[23] Some of the largest falls occurred in boroughs such as Bethnal Green, Islington, Poplar and Shoreditch, which suffered badly during the bombing raids of the blitz, meaning that many garment workers lost their homes and workplaces. Staggeringly, the number of garment workers recorded as living in Stepney fell by 21,147 during this period, or 69.8 per cent. as compared to 1931. Several West London boroughs also suffered large losses, including Fulham, Hammersmith and Wandsworth, indicating a decline in making cultures in the West of the city. Other, often more suburban North East boroughs, such as Stoke Newington, Finchley and Hackney were less-severely affected, as outflows during this period may have been partially offset by the relocation activities from nearby East End areas that were damaged more severely during the war. In the North, some boroughs, such as Edmonton, Enfield and Hendon and Hampstead, actually saw increases in the number of people employed in garment making, suggesting a possible suburbanisation effect as a result of the war.

[21] Ibid.
[22] Due to the disruption caused by war, there was no Census conducted in 1941.
[23] 'London' is defined by the 1951 Census as the 28 metropolitan boroughs that formed the County of London.

These distributions highlight the complex geographies of London garment making at this time and demonstrate that the war affected various parts of the city in different ways, reinforcing the broad range of narratives across London making cultures during this period. They also show that the war had a varying impact across genders; although many more women than men were employed in garment making roles throughout this period, the percentage decline in male garment workers is far greater than for women between 1931 and 1951, and it is far more severe in the most significantly affected boroughs. This is likely due to a range of different factors, not least the impact of conscription, but it may also indicate a change in the type of making processes employed in the city, since women were far more likely to hold lower-skilled (and lower paid) jobs as machinists, while men more frequently worked in higher-skilled roles, such as pressers.

Table 3: Number of garment workers by London borough – 1931 and 1951

	1931			1951			1931-51
Borough:	**Male**	**Female**	**Total**	**Male**	**Female**	**Total**	**% change**
Acton	317	715	1,032	83	336	419	-59.4%
Battersea	803	3,150	3,953	158	1,055	1,213	-69.3%
Bermondsey	449	1,794	2,243	79	965	1,044	-53.5%
Bethnal Green	3,177	8,049	11,226	909	3,791	4,700	-58.1%
Brentford and Chiswick	234	566	800	79	267	346	-56.8%
Camberwell	1,448	6,072	7,520	368	2,643	3,011	-60.0%
Chelsea	243	1,243	1,486	95	334	429	-71.1%
City of London	129	170	299	34	60	94	-68.6%
Deptford	423	2,033	2,456	92	828	920	-62.5%
Ealing	561	1,031	1,592	293	906	1,199	-24.7%
Edmonton	498	1,572	2,070	414	1,915	2,329	12.5%
Enfield	205	700	905	175	785	960	6.1%
Finchley	290	469	759	285	417	702	-7.5%
Finsbury	555	2,486	3,041	169	1,334	1,503	-50.6%
Fulham	739	2,654	3,393	218	981	1,199	-64.7%
Greenwich	283	1,173	1,456	90	530	620	-57.4%
Hackney	5,896	11,711	17,607	5,473	8,519	13,992	-20.5%
Hammersmith	996	2,522	3,518	290	985	1,275	-63.8%
Hampstead	657	1,164	1,821	528	1,334	1,862	2.3%

Table 3: Number of garment workers by London borough – 1931 and 1951

	1931			1951			1931-51
Borough:	**Male**	**Female**	**Total**	**Male**	**Female**	**Total**	**% change**
Hendon	803	1,405	2,208	1,092	1,224	2,316	4.9%
Heston and Isleworth	269	539	808	110	313	423	-47.6%
Holborn	412	886	1,298	159	355	514	-60.4%
Hornsey	587	1,406	1,993	342	1,108	1,450	-27.2%
Islington	2,322	9,971	12,293	1,251	6,343	7,594	-38.2%
Kensington	1,234	2,721	3,955	585	1,661	2,246	-43.2%
Lambeth	1,572	6,044	7,616	511	2,703	3,214	-57.8%
Lewisham	964	2,797	3,761	322	1,640	1,962	-47.8%
Paddington	944	3,609	4,553	613	1,882	2,495	-45.2%
Poplar	1,453	5,735	7,188	420	2,882	3,302	-54.1%
Shoreditch	1,271	5,576	6,847	420	2,528	2,948	-56.9%
Southgate	308	505	813	210	418	628	-22.8%
Southwark	1,017	4,224	5,241	170	1,500	1,670	-68.1%
St Marylebone	1,252	2,990	4,242	590	1,100	1,690	-60.2%
St Pancras	2,020	5,607	7,627	883	2,942	3,825	-49.8%
Stepney	15,282	15,000	30,282	3,570	5,565	9,135	-69.8%
Stoke Newington	900	2,279	3,179	929	2,074	3,003	-5.5%
Tottenham	1,474	4,627	6,101	777	2,728	3,505	-42.6%
Wandsworth	1,735	4,627	6,362	532	2,168	2,700	-57.6%
Westminster	114	2,755	2,869	286	885	1,171	-59.2%
Willesden	1,442	3,106	4,548	1,003	1,795	2,798	-38.5%
Wood Green	278	915	1,193	144	693	837	-29.8%
Woolwich	597	1,633	2,230	195	670	865	-61.2%
Total	**56,153**	**138,231**	**194,384**	**24,946**	**73,162**	**98,108**	**-49.5%**

Table 3:

Source: General Register Office, *Census 1931: Classifications of Occupations*, Table 16; and General Register Office, *Census 1951: Classifications of Occupations*, Table 20.

This pattern of the redistribution of garment workers and making processes can also be seen in analysis of the locations of garment-manufacturers in *Kelly's Post Office London Directories* over the same period which reflects many of the broad trends

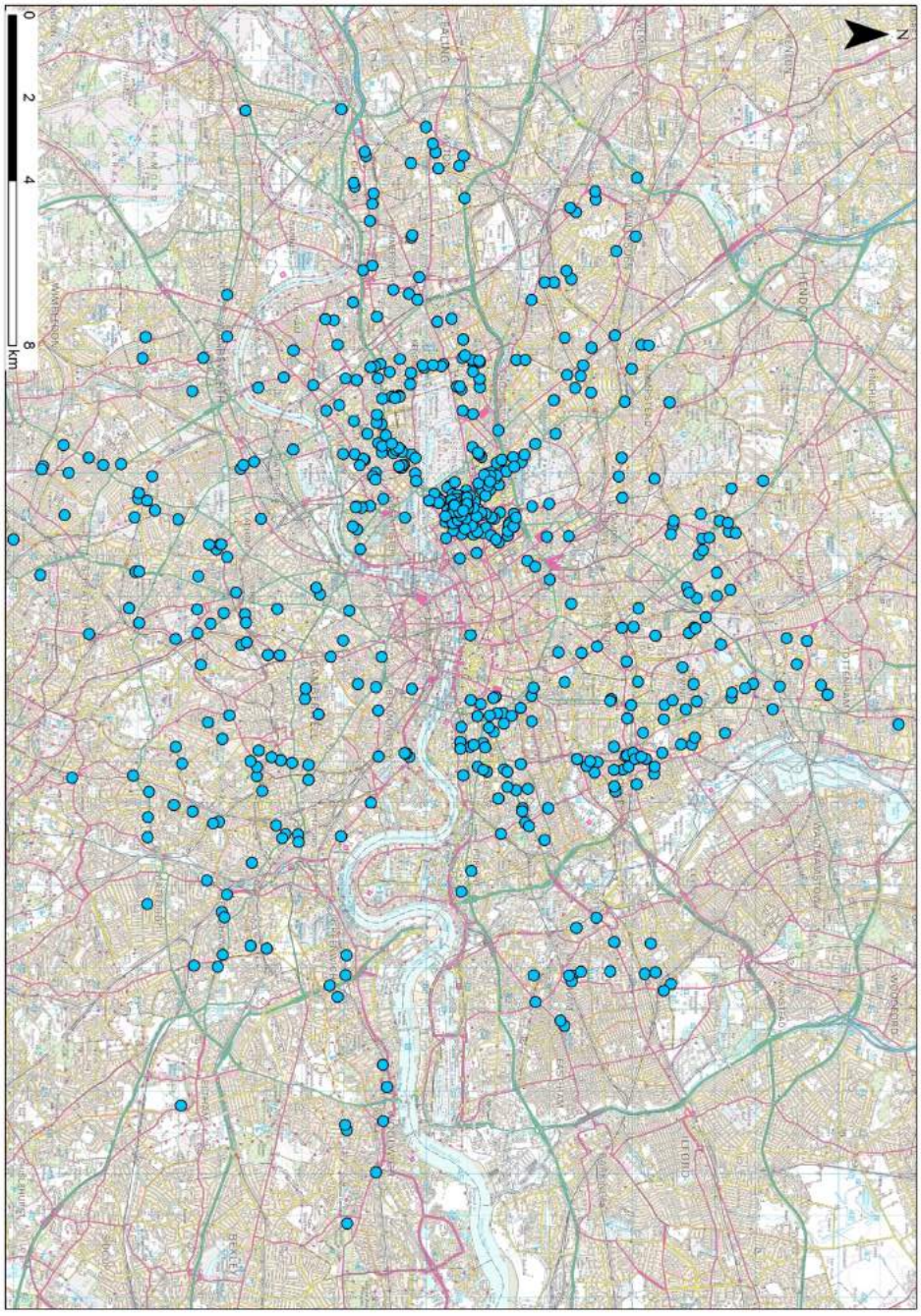
observed in the Census data.[24] Between 1939 and 1951, the number of dressmakers listed fell dramatically.[25] The distribution of this decline, however, was not uniform—the spread of dressmakers across London contracted out of more suburban areas, particularly in the West and South West of London, indicating that some areas of the city experienced a noticeable decline in skilled making cultures (figures 47 and 48). At the same time, a new type of making culture was emerging in other areas, and this period saw a growing number of new garment factories open, categorised in the directories as 'Clothiers—Manufacturing'. Mapping the growth of these facilities (figures 49 and 50) shows their locations followed the same pattern of concentration in the West End, East End and northern suburbs—particularly Hackney and Stoke Newington—that was seen in the Census. The location of these businesses demonstrates that under the new methods of fashionable production, fashionable making in London became more concentrated in fewer boroughs, notably in the West End, the East and North East. Comparing the distribution of dressmakers to clothiers, however, also shows that more traditional dressmaking processes persisted in the West End, while the new mass-production processes of the clothiers dominated in the East and North East.

While the directories do support the narrative the fashion industry grew in the West End in the immediate post-war era, this growth does not represent a relocation of lost City businesses. The West End's growth is equally matched in Aldgate, Whitechapel and Mile End. The spatial distribution of the post-war fashion industry is further confused as the directories also show an increase in the number of businesses listed with multiple locations. Some of these, such as Evering Manufacturing Ltd, a company based in Whitechapel, expanded between 1945 and 1948 into multiple locations within walking distance of each other, suggesting a difficulty in finding a single suitable building in the area to house its growing business. More commonly, manufacturers with factories in the East End, such as Greenberg S. & Sons (Mantles) Ltd, makers of Evandore models, expanded in two directions—opening showrooms in the West End and new factories in suburban areas such as Walthamstow and Clapton, where space was at less of a premium (figure 51). Clearly not all the new

[24] Although the Census records show the locations in which garment workers lived, rather than worked—which would have also been impacted by factors external to the locations of factories and workrooms, such as housing availability and costs—they are still a useful indicator for the changing location of making in the city, not least due to increasing numbers of homeworkers at this time. See pages 172-173.
[25] *Kelly's Post Office London Commercial and Trades Directories*, 1939 and 1951.

Figure 47
(overleaf):

Locations of London dressmakers in 1939, based on information sourced from *Kelly's Post Office London Commercial and Trades Directories*, 1939.


0
2
4
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km
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Figure 48
(overleaf):

Locations of London dressmakers in 1951, based information sourced from on *Kelly's Post Office London Commercial and Trades Directories*, 1951.

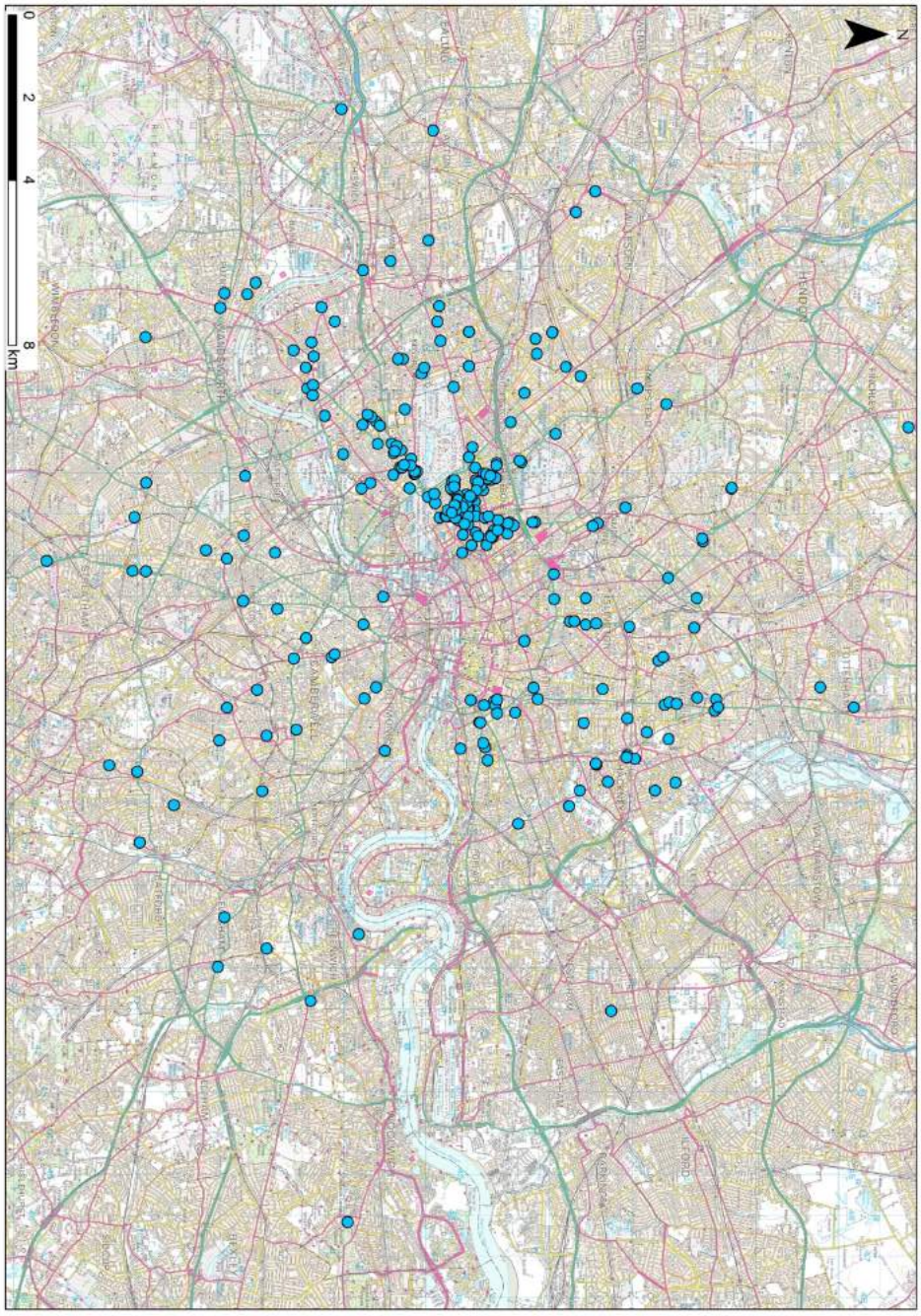
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Figure 49
(overleaf):

Locations of London clothing manufacturers in 1939, based on information sourced from *Kelly's Post Office London Commercial and Trades Directories*, 1939.

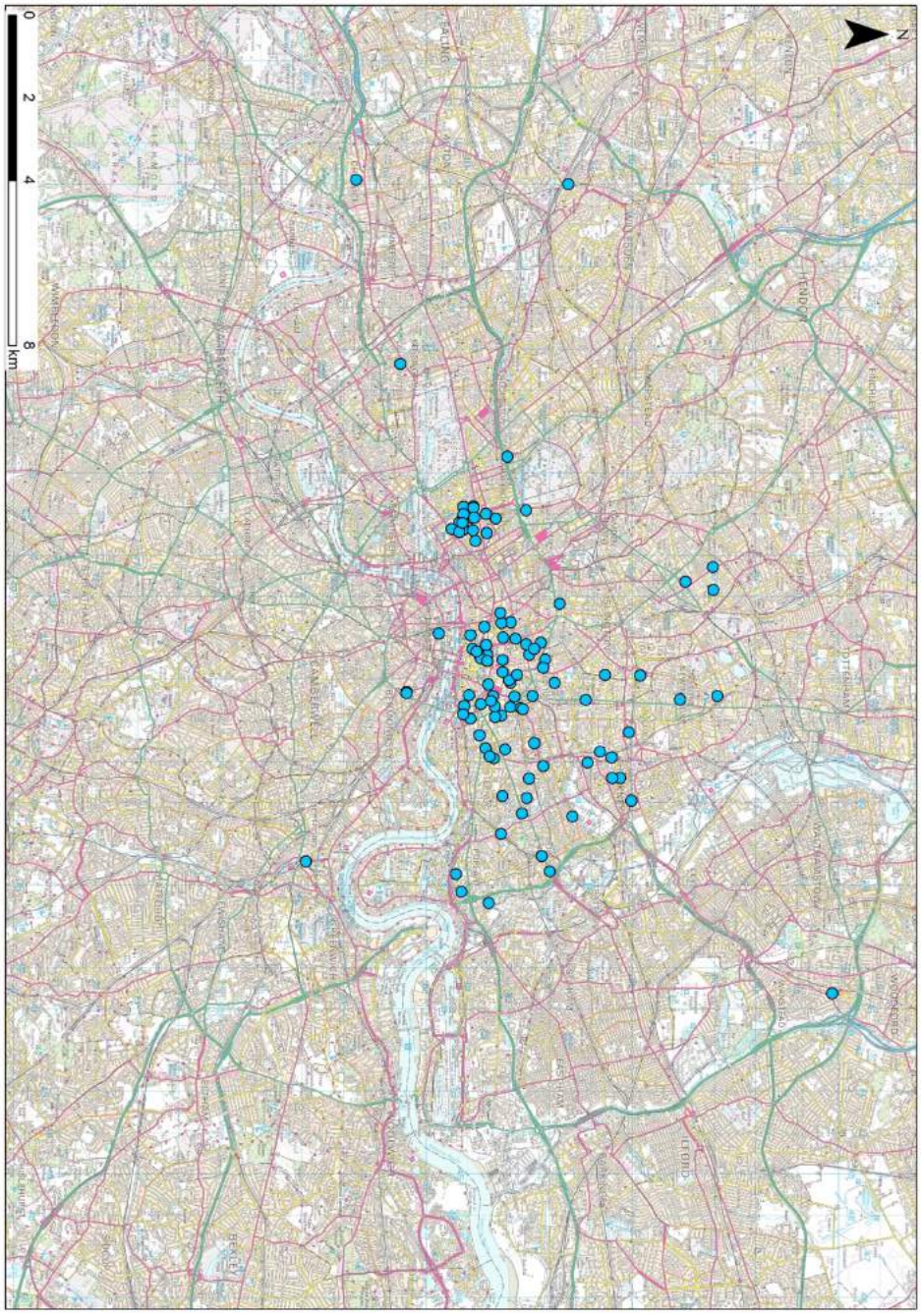
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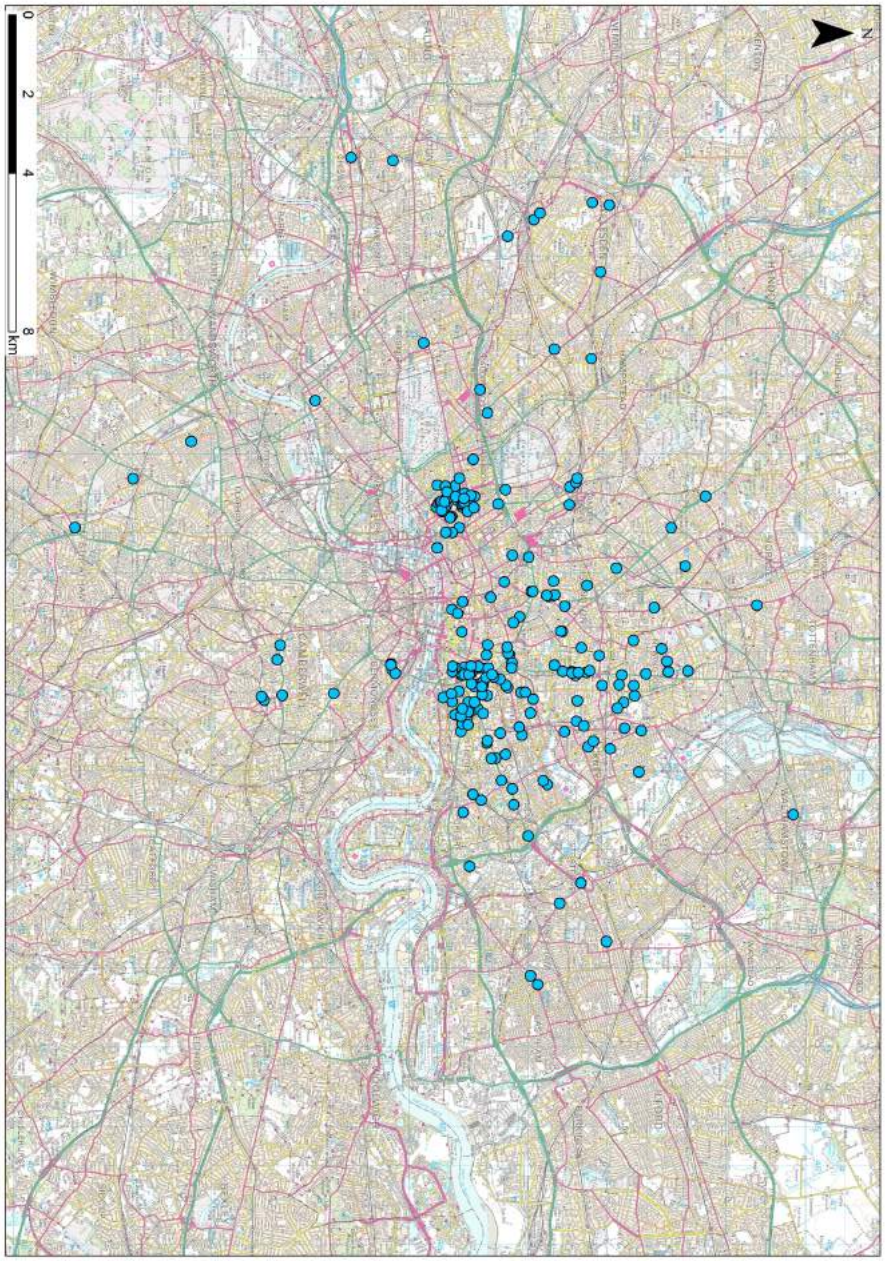
Figure 50
(overleaf):

Locations of London clothing manufacturers in 1951, based information sourced from on *Kelly's Post Office London Commercial and Trades Directories*, 1951.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km
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premises opening in the West End were devoted to garment manufacture, and many of the firms opening headquarters and showrooms in the West End were simultaneously relocating their factories to suburban locations with more space.

The data discussed here shows that post-war London fashion manufacture was a declining industry with a changing output, but in order to further understand the reasons behind this, the next part of this chapter focuses on how austerity particularly shaped the production of mass and mid-market womenswear in the city, recognising that data from the *Census of Production* indicates that this was an area of growth for London. This sector of the market is under-researched in fashion histories of the period, in spite of the fact it offers rich possibilities for furthering our understanding of austerity policies. Although they made a significant impact on the changing geographies of the post-war fashion industry in London, the precise impact of austerity policies and economic conditions are hard to trace through numerical data or location maps. In order to understand not just how but why the geographies of London fashion changed during the 1940s, the next part of this chapter finds it necessary to look closer, moving in from the city-wide map to the details of the workroom to see what was being made in London at this time, who by, and what processes were involved.

Figure 51:

Locations of Greenberg S. & Sons (Mantles) Ltd as they expanded from their original East End location to add a showroom in the West End and a new factory in Clapton.

How austerity reshaped London's fashion industry

By 1951, the London map showed a severely changed making culture, with both garment makers and the places where they worked subject to significant disruption by war damage. The rapid ascent of mass-market manufacturing of ready-to-wear clothes, however, owes as much, if not more, to government regulation and austerity policies as it does to aerial bombing. Although London's garment industry was on the cusp of change in the 1930s, the conditions imposed on the industry by the Second World War further accelerated the pace of change by encouraging the type of mass manufacture production that London, with its reliance on high-end production, struggled to compete with. Although there is much literature examining the impact of government regulation on the wartime garment industry, there is little examination of post-war regulation or its effect on London specifically.[26] The impact of austerity on London's garment industry was markedly different from the rest of Britain due to the unique make-up of the city's production processes. In broad terms, the austerity policies of restricted fabric supply, design regulations and price controls that benefitted the British fashion industry as a whole were disastrous for London's garment workers and factory owners.

Evidence of these changes to London manufacturing can be glimpsed in the material processes of extant garments. Building on object-based studies of commodity chains and manufacturing, this study considers how the processes of material transformation evidenced in these objects can be used to track technologies and divisions of labour across the post-war city.[27] Focusing on these making processes reconnects the material objects to the sites and bodies that shaped them, revealing the untold stories of makers and demonstrating how they evolved and translated making processes.[28] Looking at the materiality of fashion objects confirms that they are products of numerous different places, hands and methods of creative practice. This understanding calls on us to reconsider the agency of makers and the relationship between individuals, industry and the fashion city. This section looks for the small signs of how a garment was put together in order to understand how the industry was changing as a result of austerity and how this reshaped the making

[26] See Brown, *CC41 Utility Clothing*; Sladen, *The Conscription of Fashion.*
[27] Cook, 'Follow the Thing', 644; Moon, 'From Factories to Fashion', 196.
[28] See Gibson, 'Material Inheritances'; Patchett, 'The taxidermist's apprentice'.

cultures of the city and the role of garment-makers. Careful looking at the minute details of fashion objects reveals how garment workers shaped the clothes they made through novel decisions such as where to put a seam or which colour thread to use. These signs demonstrate how small acts by individual cutters and machinists in London made important contributions to the material outputs of the city's fashion industry.[29]

The garments discussed in this section were also selected for their ability to raise questions about how some London designers and bespoke manufacturers are valued and memorialised while the contributions made by other makers have been omitted from the historical record. Although, at first sight, many of these garments seem to adhere to familiar historical agglomerations, with high-end bespoke making located in the West End and low-quality mass-market clothing produced in the East End, close looking reveals that these garments provide examples of how London making processes interconnected spatially through practices of outworking and subcontracting, revealing the fluid boundaries and shared spaces of post-war fashion.

Uncovering the making stories of garments from the Museum of London is especially revelatory, due to the collection's location as well as the prominence of everyday clothing within it. Mapping the locations of London's garment factories reveals that the Museum of London is surrounded by hidden fashion history. Where the steel and glass office blocks of the City now dominate the skyline, once stood garment workrooms, factories and wholesale offices. Scant evidence of the making heritage of this part of London remains, surviving primarily in archived letterheads and minute books, but there are still a few remaining landmarks of the fashion industry if you know where to look. A short walk north of the Museum, remnants of this mid-century industry can be glimpsed in the large windows of Clerkenwell's converted office buildings. At the junction of Goswell Road and Old Street, Harella House, one-time home of the L. Harris & Co. factory, still stands opposite the Hat and Feathers pub, once a favourite meeting place for members of the London branch of the National Union of Tailors and Garment Workers. Although little indication of any fashionable past remains from the street, records tell us that Harella House, now the offices of an online fashion retailer, was the site of one of the biggest industrial disputes by

[29] Pareja-Eastaway, 'Creative Industries', 38-50.

garment workers in the 1940s, with the Hat and Feathers—now a trendy restaurant—the location in which this industrial action was plotted.[30] It is highly likely that at least some of the items now contained within the Museum's collection were made in the factories of Goswell Road, not far from the rolling stacks hidden in which they are now stored. In spite of this proximity, the connection between the Museum's collection of London fashions and the locations and methods of their production is scarcely recorded in the Museum's catalogue. This makes it necessary to consider these objects in relation to other contextual material.

Understanding the processes by which the city's industry functioned in more detail requires bringing together material fashion objects with supporting archival evidence about government regulation and the changing global garment industry. In particular, this chapter examines the way London fashion was changed by two sets of legislation: the Making of Civilian Clothing (Restrictions) orders, which regulated the designs, cuts and embellishment of commercially produced clothing between 1942 and 1946, and Utility Apparel orders, which regulated the supply of cloth to manufacturers and the price of clothing between 1941 and 1952.[31] This chapter explores the impact of the combined 'austerity' effects of this legislation by tracing the making processes of various 'London' garments, explaining how austerity impacted existing production processes and influenced the development of new ones. In doing so, these making stories show a shift in London production away from the traditional methods of retail and wholesale bespoke towards a new type of 'fast' fashion in the form of cheap ready-to-wear dresses, and they reveal how these changes helped cement a new reputation for London as a centre of design rather than manufacture.

The damaging impact of austerity on established making processes in London

In order to understand how the products and processes of London fashion changed as a result of austerity, it is necessary to first understand the making heritage out of which they emerged. As demonstrated by the inter-war *Census of Production* data, the bulk of London's pre-war fashion industry revolved around retail bespoke manufacture, with the high-end nature of this business accounting for the city's

[30] NUTGW London Branch Dispute Records. Hackney Archives, D/S/24/3/16.
[31] For further details of the development of this legislation, see Sladen, *The Conscription of Fashion*.

disproportionately large market share of national gross output. As such, this study of London making begins by considering the impact of austerity design restrictions on retail bespoke production in the city.

The making processes of retail bespoke are clearly exemplified by figure 52, a grey wool coat made in 1946. Unlike coats produced for London's growing ready-to-wear market, this coat was made with one specific body in mind—that of the purchaser for whom it was made up by the workroom staff at Harrods department store. Unlike ready-to-wear coats from this period, which rely on tucks and adjustable belts to provide an approximated best fit across a range of body shapes, the back of this coat is comprised of six long panels, shaped by constructional seams that are cut to mirror the dimensions of the wearer's back and waist. This means that the coat must fit the wearer precisely in order for it to hang properly, a risky cut that would not be used for mass manufactured garments.

Figure 52:
Full-skirted coat in grey wool. Made in 1946 by Harrods Ltd, a department store in Kensington, London. Museum of London, 67.49.

Harrods's workroom offered a personalised service to customers, who were able to commission garments based on the latest fashions, modified to fit their individual tastes and needs. These garments were made-to-measure creative collaborations between workroom staff and customers, and customers were even able to provide their own fabric if they did not approve of any stocked by the store. Unlike the majority of ready-to-wear pieces, cut to a set of standard 'graded' sizes, this service required a workroom full of skilled cutters, able to adapt designs to suit the quirks of individual bodies. Since no two bodies were the same, no two garments were either, and workroom staff were highly skilled in translating the numerical measurements of a customer's body into a three-dimensional form. This coat demonstrates a complex and time-consuming range of bespoke making skills. For example, the coat's two false pocket flaps conceal a substantial amount of stiff padding, added to emphasise the hips of the wearer, which would have been individually sculpted to fit their body.

The Board of Trade *Census of Production* data demonstrate that retail bespoke items still accounted for a significant proportion of London's gross output in the 1940s. Crucially, this figure is higher for London than elsewhere in the country, indicating a concentration of skilled makers in the city.[32] Yet, while the historic agglomerations of Savile Row's bespoke tailors and Mayfair's court dressmakers are still well known today, history has largely forgotten the department store workrooms through which a significant proportion of London's retail bespoke making was commissioned at this time. Skilled cutters often worked between multiple firms, and many apprentice cutters transferred from the workrooms of famous couturiers to department stores.[33] This knowledge sharing meant the creative talents of department store workroom staff were well respected, giving London retailers a competitive advantage over their provincial rivals. Managers investigating the high sales figures attained by Peter Jones's fashion departments between 1946 and 1950 found that retail bespoke workroom orders formed the backbone of fashion sales in the store, with reports indicating that made-to-measure services were popular due to the quality of their output and the creative possibilities they offered for individual customisation.[34]

[32] Board of Trade, *Final Report on the Census of Production for 1948*, Table 5.
[33] Membership Records of the National Union of Tailors and Garment Workers. Hackney Archives, D/S/24/3/9.
[34] *John Lewis Gazette*, 15 May 1948. John Lewis Archive.

But the costly, high-end output of retail bespoke was waning in popularity. The rise of mass market ready-to-wear fashions had been negatively impacting London's retail bespoke market since the late 1930s as consumers increasingly opted for cheaper ready-to-wear garments, but austerity policies increased pressure on these firms at a time when the city, suffering from the impact of sustained aerial bombardment, was at its weakest. A heavily beaded silk cocktail suit (figure 53) from the Museum of London's collections helps to explain why this sector struggled during the 1940s, demonstrating the negative impact that austerity design restrictions and skills shortages had on the skilled cultures of London production.

Figure 53:
Beaded jacket from Peggy Lewis and Company. Museum of London, 2002.155/2a.

The suit was made by Peggy Lewis & Company, a company that had established a strong customer base in the inter-war period. Situated on Whitfield Street, just off Tottenham Court Road in London's West End, the company primarily produced special occasion wear and specialised in embroidery. This jacket exemplifies the high level of skill possessed by the firm's staff, demonstrating that the embellishment and bespoke skills were not limited to the couture houses of Mayfair. Such elaborate embellishment was hit hard during the war, when austerity regulations severely

restricted surface decoration. Making of Civilian Clothing (Restrictions) orders, more commonly known as austerity regulations or restrictions, applied to all commercially produced clothing between May 1942 and 5 April 1946.[35] Although widely conflated with Utility Apparel Orders, which controlled the supply and regulated the price of cloth and clothing, austerity regulations were a separate set of regulations that controlled clothing styles, cuts and embellishment in order to eliminate unnecessary materials and labour at a time when such things were in short supply.[36] These restrictions prohibited the use of embellishment such as the beading, and their repeal would have initially been of great relief to the staff at P. Lewis & Co. However, although official austerity restrictions were entirely revoked in 1946, embroidery and couture making techniques would remain suppressed in London, as the lingering impact of austerity restrictions on training and working methods could not be as swiftly undone.

Under lights, the dazzling effect of the panels of dart-shaped embroidery that dominate the front of the jacket betrays the hours of work that such work must have entailed. Each glass bead has been hand-sewn to the fabric, and each bead type selected based on the way its size and shape will reflect light and contribute to the overall aesthetic. The work of specialist embroiderers, as seen on this jacket, was a time-consuming and repetitive process, but one that demanded both skill and creativity. This skilled culture was nurtured in the inter-war period by a mixture of in-house training provided by bespoke workrooms and a concentration of educational establishments, such as the nearby Barrett Street Technical School (now the London College of Fashion), whose alumnae frequently went on to work in the high-end bespoke workrooms of the West End.[37] Like much of the broader fashion industry in London, the educational opportunities available were disrupted by the Second World War. Barrett Street's enrollment fell as families left London during the blitz, and the school's buildings were left badly damaged by incendiary bombs in 1941. To compound this skills shortage, bespoke makers lost staff to war work and halted much of their recruitment and training as austerity design restrictions curtailed demand for their goods. Even after the abolition of design restrictions after the war, the high rates

[35] 1943-1944 Making of Civilian Clothing (Restrictions) Order No 1, TNA, BT 64/905; *Draper's Record*, 9 March 1946, 15.
[36] Howell, *Wartime Fashion*, Chapter 9.
[37] Barrett Street Trade School Prospectuses for the years 1930 to 1950. London College of Fashion Archive.

of purchase tax on luxury materials continued to suppress demand for the high-end output of retail bespoke workrooms, causing many to cease recruiting and training new staff. In spite of the city's continued reliance on high-end making, by the end of the decade, London's bespoke workrooms were much diminished in their skillsets.

Figure 54:
'British Textiles' cartoon featuring manufacturers, retailers and wholesalers riding victory float while wrestling snakes labeled 'PAYE', 'Coupons', 'labour shortage' and 'profit cuts'. *Draper's Record*, 8 June 1946, 15.

There is a long tradition of wars promoting standardisation in fashion manufacture, but the type of production encouraged by government regulation during and after the Second World War marked a particularly dramatic break from the past.[38] Because of this, the austerity policies of the 1940s did not just impact the dressmakers and tailors of London's retail bespoke trade, they also radically changed the shape of London's wholesale garment-making industry, which had traditionally operated around a model of small-scale, high-end, responsive manufacture. Austerity policies enforced these changes at such a pace that the city struggled to adapt to the new realities of fashion manufacture.

[38] Green, *Ready-to-Wear and Ready-to-Work*, 30-31.

Government restrictions had a broadly positive impact on the national fashion industry as a whole between 1941 and 1947 because they ensured a seller's market for a number of years, with manufacturers guaranteed custom by retailers 'able to sell all they can get'.[39] In spite of the fact that purchasing was restricted by rationing and shortage of material and labour restricted output, garment manufacture was an enormously prosperous business in the years between 1941 and 1947, largely thanks to the complex legislation that made up Utility Apparel orders.[40] The government's licensing of Utility production encouraged a concentration of the industry, which helped large manufacturers keep overheads low. The Utility Scheme specified that production runs of each style should exceed 1,000 items, whereas before the war the industry average was around 100.[41] Utility manufacturers were guaranteed of their costs, and competition was minimised as no new firms were allowed to start up unless guaranteed a coupon float.[42] Austerity restrictions were so beneficial to some makers-up that, in January 1946, they petitioned the Board of Trade not to scrap the restrictions as they encouraged a slow pace of fashion change that allowed for longer and more profitable manufacturing runs.[43]

The growing profitability and dominance of large-scale producers was particularly damaging to London's wholesale industry, which was overwhelmingly comprised of smaller firms, typically with only 10 to 20 machines and specialising in high-end tailored goods at both bespoke and ready-to-wear levels.[44] Post-war membership records of the London branch of the National Union of Tailors and Garment Workers (NUTGW) reveal the make-up of such workforces, a typical example of which can be found in J. Schwarz Mantles Ltd of 20-25 Planet Street, E1. In 1948, this firm employed 16 people to work in its factory, a workforce comprised of 6 machinists (2 of which were specialists, trained to work the overlocking machines), 4 tailors, 4 pressers and 2 cutters.[45] The high ratio of pressers and tailors to machinists demonstrates the

[39] *Draper's Record*, 18 August 1945, 9.
[40] Utility Apparel Orders were introduced in 1941 as part of a series of supply limitations designed to regulate the supply and price of cloth and made up garments. TNA, BT 64/835.
[41] Boydell, *Horrockses Fashions*, 28.
[42] This meant that new companies needed access to an existing supply of coupons with which to purchase fabric, as they were not granted a new one by the Board of Trade.
[43] *Draper's Record*, 12 January 1946, 24.
[44] The 1948 *Census of Production* shows dramatic growth in the number of garment making businesses with over 100 employees. Board of Trade, *Final report on the Census of Production for 1948*, Table 4.
[45] NUTGW Membership Records. Hackney Archives, D/S/24/3/16.

quantity of skilled and varied work and the relative expense involved in making tailored outerwear as compared to light clothing, such as dresses and shirts, which required far fewer pressers, allowing producers to save money as pressers commanded higher wages than machinists.

The types of goods made through the production methods of factories like J. Schwarz struggled to compete under the combined pressure of standardised mass production and rising prices, accelerated by government austerity policies. In the inter-war years, London's producers had been particularly dominant in the field of women's tailoring, producing high- to medium-end coats and suits in small volumes. Examining outputs of this production process, such as the red 'Koupy' model coat shown in figure 55, reveals why high-end wholesale firms were not suited to the new methods taking over the industry. Koupy was a brand name owned by Charles Kuperstein, whose wholesale business, which was based on Wardour Street in the West End and specialised in womenswear, was typical of this sector of the London industry. The coat itself contains clues that the company utilised small scale, responsive production methods. The coat was produced between 1944 and 1945, and its wide shoulders reflect the latest styles to come out of post-liberation Paris. Yet this is not simply a quick copy rendered according to austerity restrictions—its cut is carefully considered and balanced, and it has been constructed using a number of traditional tailoring methods including hand finishing, as can be seen at the seams and buttonholes. In addition to this, it still contains its wholesale label, having been directly donated to the Museum by the manufacturer himself. This label reveals that this model, rather romantically titled 'Monica', would have formed part of a collection that was showcased to various retailers, who could choose to have it made up in a variety of sizes and other fabrics. Although the coat bears the trademark 'CC41' Utility stamp, it is the product of making processes a world away from the large-scale models of mass production championed by the government and encouraged by regulation, and as such a remnant of a culture of fashionable making that was in decline by the time of its making.

Figure 55:
'Koupy' Utility coat in red wool. Museum of London, 45.3/2a.

The processes of London's small wholesale firms were rooted in a system developed in the early twentieth century, as described by Eric Newby in *Something Wholesale,* a memoir of the time he spent working at his father's firm in the late 1940s. The business model Newby describes relied on a large number of small orders placed by individual department stores and independent dress shops, with manufacture completed in in-house workrooms or subcontracted to outworkers.[46] This model of manufacture was actively discouraged by government regulations. Price Control Orders formed an integral part of the Utility scheme that regulated the maximum prices and profit margins that retailers, wholesalers and manufacturers could achieve.[47] These Price Control Orders encouraged manufacturers to sell directly to a small number of big stores, as only wholesalers 'who conduct a regular selling organisation for supplying retail and who carry substantial stocks in relation to their turnover' were able to take advantage of the full profit margin allowed by the orders.[48]

[46] Newby, *Something Wholesale*, 107-108 and 147-158.
[47] Goods and Services (Price Control) Act. Utility Cloth (Maximum Prices Orders, 1942). TNA, BT 64/78.
[48] *Draper's Record*, 14 January 1950, 32.

The scrapping of austerity restrictions and gradual easing of Utility Apparel Orders from 1946 onwards saw the end of the boom years for big makers, and by 1948 the same large wholesale firms that apologetically boasted that they were unable to take on new customers in the 1945 and 1946 seasons were eagerly touting for business, placing lavish, full-page adverts in the trade press to lure buyers to view their collections.[49] By this time, however, the gains made by companies specialising in large-scale mass production were solidified, and the industry power of small wholesalers weakened. As *Draper's Record* explained as early as 1945, 'there are several explanations for the smaller part now played by wholesale houses in the distribution of women's ready-made outerwear, among them being the increased trade volume done by direct buying department stores, the growth in size and number of chain shop groups specialising in coats, suits and frocks, and the linking of many retail outlets with their own manufacturing facilities', all of which can be linked to the move towards large-scale production encouraged by Utility regulations.[50]

Small scale businesses had suffered disproportionately at the hands of wartime and post-war regulation and pressures of scale forced out many smaller manufacturers, most commonly as a result of the ways in which Utility production was allocated, the pressures of tight Utility margins and the disproportionate impact of shortages on small firms. The difficulty of obtaining materials was one of the most acute problems facing London firms. In 1948, the NUTGW complained that a shortage of materials was 'handicapping the Retail Bespoke industry', noting that the challenge was particularly pressing in London.[51] This was a problem that had been growing since the war, caused by the dramatic loss of 45 per cent. of the labour forces of Britain's wool and worsted mills between Dunkirk and VE day.[52] It was also a problem the Board of Trade had consistently failed to deal with, instead choosing to reserve fabric for export at the expense of the home trade.[53]

London makers responded to fabric shortages with ingenuity, as can be seen in the miniature tailored items contained in the Museum of London's collections (figure 56). In order to work around an acute fabric shortage, tailor Harold Sims, based in the City

[49] *Draper's Record*, 15 May 1948, 7,15.
[50] *Draper's Record*, 13 October 1945, 16.
[51] *Garment Worker*, February 1948, 40.
[52] *Draper's Record*, 7 April 1945, 13.
[53] *Draper's Record*, 7 April 1945, 12.

at 118 Bishopsgate, produced 13 jackets and coats in different styles at half their normal size in order to show off his products to customers. Each piece was carefully hand-finished, and their novelty reportedly attracted admiring glances in the direction of his shop window.[54] However, over a sustained period of shortages, such publicity stunts did little to solve the ongoing difficulties faced by small firms in obtaining enough fabric to fulfill orders.

Figure 56:
Half-sized tailor model of a lounge suit jacket by Harold Sim. Museum of London, 2002.156/3.

The disproportionate impact of shortages on small makers is a reoccurring theme on the pages of *Draper's Record* throughout the late 1940s. The publication's hopes that shortages had peaked in June 1945, with the situation so dire that some dressmakers posed as civilians in order to buy fabric from commercial shops, proved to be overly optimistic.[55] The fuel crisis of 1947, arising from labour shortages and exacerbated by an exceptionally cold winter, limited the operating hours of mills, leading to a drop in the amount of fabric available.[56] Many London makers complained that these shortages seriously impacted their ability to fulfill orders. Small firms were less likely

[54] 'Manikin Parade for Men', *The Tailor and Cutter*, 15 July 1949.
[55] *Draper's Record*, 9 June 1945, 9.
[56] Kynaston, *Austerity Britain*, 192; *Garment Worker*, January 1948, 6.

to have a choice of supply networks, leaving some, such as Norman Linton Ltd's of Oxford Street, to resort to placing small ads in the trade press for 'Urgently required Utility dress-weight material'.[57] At the mercy of suppliers, small firms trying to plan production schedules faced an almost impossible task, with one London maker-up in April 1945 reporting that he had 30,000 garments to be finished by Easter, but 'possessed linings for only 50'.[58] Small manufacturers had far less bargaining power with either suppliers or customers than their larger counterparts, and an inability to deliver finished products on time often resulted in cancelled contracts. In such an environment, it is unsurprising that bribery and corruption was rife in fabric procurement, and there are reports of suppliers demanding as much as 5 shillings per yard in cash over the invoice price for particularly sought after fabrics such as moss crepe.[59]

Shortages came not only in the form of fabric, but also in a shortage of electricity. The same power cuts that forced mills to cease production also interrupted the work of makers up, and London manufacturers were forced to adapt working hours to the times of day when power was available.[60] In the spring of 1947, this resulted in many of the city's machinists working 7-9 a.m., 12-2 p.m. and 7-9 p.m., waiting around with nothing to do in workrooms between these hours.[61] The difficulties of operating a business in this environment are present in the tangible sense of exhaustion expressed by many small-scale garment makers in the letters page of *Draper's Record*. Further burdened by a plethora of confusing and seemingly ever-changing rules and regulations—Utility Apparel Orders were amended virtually every month, and breaking them was a criminal offence—many firms were unable to survive post-war austerity conditions.

Outside of regulations and shortages, austerity also brought new technologies that changed the processes of London making. The Second World War intensified the advance of mechanisation in Britain's garment industry, and the post-war government continued to champion a drive towards mechanisation in the belief that the resulting increases in productivity would alleviate the continued pressures of

[57] *Draper's Record*, 4 January 1947, 74.
[58] *Draper's Record*, 5 April 1947, 15.
[59] *Draper's Record*, 16 March 1946, 56.
[60] *Draper's Record*, 15 February 1947, 13.
[61] An Oral History of British Fashion. British Library, C1046/02/08 F12836B, 122.

rationing and concurrent consumer disquiet. In 1947, Stafford Cripps, then president of the Board of Trade, warned garment workers to embrace technology more fully, since there would be no wage rises without an increase in productivity in the industry. At the same time, he also appealed to consumers to support this move, reminding them 'we cannot consume more than we produce'.[62] While the broader economic behind this message was generally accepted at the time, it betrays a wider disregard held by the post-war government for the skills and cultures of craftsmanship possessed by many garment workers. This proved particularly problematic for London, a centre of fashionable making that suddenly found its skilled culture was no longer required.

As a result of these pressures, technological advances undercut the need for many of the industry's skilled jobs. Adverts in the trade press during the late 1940s reveal a barrage of new machinery available to factories, including imported 'American' machines, capable of leveling hems and hemming and pinking a skirt 'in one operation', which was particularly useful as skirts became longer and fuller during this period.[63] Several East London factories enthusiastically embraced this new technology, such as the Style Dress factory on Commercial Road who produced colourful but low-cost womenswear. These machines, which promised no more 'guesswork', directly challenged the roles of skilled finishers who were previously responsible for hemming garments by hand, skillfully judging the level of the hem as they went.[64] Similarly, the roles of pressers and cutters were also challenged by technology, such as a new 'Express Automatic Cloth Laying Table', that rendered the making processes in which they had been trained, and in which the London industry was rooted, increasingly uneconomic.[65]

Labour-saving new technologies, combined with minimum standards for Utility products, reduced the gap in quality between 'medium' quality mass manufacture goods and the 'better' end of the ready-to-wear market, which was traditionally concentrated in London.[66] By 1947, it was mass producers rather than skilled

[62] *Draper's Record*, 1 February 1947, 20.
[63] *Draper's Record*, 9 March 1946, 21.
[64] *Draper's Record*, 26 March 1949, 79.
[65] *Draper's Record*, 18 January 1947, 83.
[66] *Draper's Record*, 17 November 1945, 17.

Figure 57:
Marks and Spencer dress, c. 1945-1948. Museum of London, 83.603/10.

dressmakers who were praised by the British Standards Institute as setting the highest standards in ready-to-wear.[67] The difference between making quality in pre- and post-war low-cost dresses is starkly apparent in the Museum of London's collections, and the successful use of technology to improve standards is perhaps best exemplified by an example from Marks and Spencer, likely dating between 1945 and 1948 (figure 57). New technologies have allowed the dress to be finished to a higher quality without investing in more skilled labour. For example, the inside seams are neatly finished, something typically absent from previous ready-to-wear dresses in this price range but enabled by the investment in the latest overlocking technology. Marks and Spencer were not only early adopters of technologies, but developers of it. The company worked closely with the government and textile industry during the duration of the Utility scheme, sharing knowledge from their textile testing laboratory

[67] *Draper's Record*, 13 December 1947, 18-19.

and developing ever closer ties with mills and suppliers in order to ensure they had control over both the quality and quantity of fabrics that were required for their products.[68] Such control was only possible due to the scale of their operations; for many smaller London firms, the technology that benefited Marks and Spencer's large factories was far too expensive to invest in.

The mid- to high-end suits and coats that formed the backbone of London's fashion industry were also under pressure from rising prices due to the impact of inflation and government price ceilings, which decreased the popularity of these items with consumers. By June 1946, clothes were selling at about 150 per cent. of their 1934 price once purchases taxes were factored in.[69] Price increases changed many people's shopping habits—not only reducing the frequency with which they shopped, but changing the items they purchased as they replaced high-end made-to-measure and bespoke with mass market ready-to-wear. This trend was observed across a diverse range of ages and socio-economic groups, from fashion-conscious young women in Chelsea who traded their retail bespoke purchases for cheaper ready-to-wear items when shopping in Peter Jones, to an older man from Camberwell who found himself buying standard size 12 shoes in Gamages even though, as he explained, his old made-to-measure shoes were a far better fit because buying made-to-measure 'is very expensive nowadays'.[70]

High levels of inflation on fashion goods were at least partially tied to the policies of the post-war government, who saw high-end fashion as an unnecessary luxury at a time of national crisis. The government imposed high levels of purchase tax on non-Utility garments, particularly those made using silk, fur and leather, which were subject to purchase tax rates ranging between 66.6 and 100 per cent. between 1942 and 1951, a policy that hit London's high-end makers particularly hard.[71] In addition to purchase tax, makers across the spectrum struggled in the face of rapidly rising fabric prices as raw cotton and wool prices increased.[72] This inflationary tendency was

[68] Chislett, *Marks in Time*, 56; 'Marks and Spencer company meeting', *Draper's Record*, 2 July 1949, 92.
[69] *Draper's Record*, 29 June 1946, 20.
[70] Report on an increase in sales of inexpensive fashions at Peter Jones. *John Lewis Gazette*, 15 May 1948. John Lewis Archive; Diary for 16 December 1950, Mass Observation, D 5098.
[71] Board of Trade policies on purchase tax. TNA, BT 64/2198 and BT 64/735.
[72] *Draper's Record*, 26 October 1946, 17.

exacerbated by the decision to end government subsidy on Utility wool and cotton cloth in the spring of 1948, which had to a large extent protected consumers in the immediate post-war years.[73] Prices rose immediately on garments made using the new, unsubsidised fabrics, which were traced by the 'X' that prefixed the usual Utility number on their labels.[74] British textile output struggled to regain its pre-war strength, and the country increasingly relied on imports to fulfill its production needs.[75] This caused further price rises after Stafford Cripps, by this time Chancellor of the Exchequer, devalued the pound by over 30 per cent. on 18 September 1949, which may have made British exports more attractive but dramatically increased the price of imported fabric for the home market.[76]

The cost of making-up garments also rose quickly between 1945 and 1948 due to a rapid uplift in garment worker's wages, partly as a result employers offsetting the impact of higher income taxes and the introduction of national insurance on take-home pay, but also due to the organisational strength of the NUTGW.[77] Having finally amalgamated with the United Ladies Tailors' Trade Union in 1939, the enlarged body spent much of the immediate post-war period fighting hard for wage increases, particularly for women workers, who typically earned less than half the hourly rates of their male counterparts.[78] In 1949, the Union's General Secretary Anne Loughlin proudly announced that, thanks to their efforts, women garment workers' basic wages had more than doubled in the prior 10 years, with the basic time rate increasing from 7 ½ d. per hour to 1s. 5d. per hour and the piecework basis time rate and conveyor belt rate rising from 8 ½ d. to 1s. 6 ½ d. per hour.[79] Although women workers were still paid considerably less than their male counterparts, the gap was closing. Of course, rising wages equated to rising production costs, and in 1948 the NUTGW admitted that wages, which grew 16 per cent. between 1945 and 1947, accounted for a significant proportion of wholesale garment price increases, which rose by 20 per cent. during the same period.[80]

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[73] *Draper's Record*, 21 February 1948, 19; *Draper's Record*, 10 January 1948, 50.
[74] *Draper's Record*, 10 January 1948, 50.
[75] Ibid., 54.
[76] Hennessy, *Never Again*, 374.
[77] Committee Minutes, 26 August 1948. Hackney Archives, D/S/24/3/3.
[78] NUTGW investigation shows that male machinists in London are paid around £16, whereas female machinists only receive £6-10-00. Hackney Archives, D/S/24/3/14.
[79] *Garment Worker*, January 1949, 3.
[80] *Garment Worker*, February 1948, 33.

To counteract these trends, the government used a system of strict price ceilings in an attempt to control inflation on fashion goods. Price ceilings regulated the maximum sale price and percentage profits that could be achieved by manufacturers, wholesalers and retailers. They had been an important part of the Utility scheme since its launch, but in the face of rapid inflation they were extended to non-Utility products from the beginning of March 1946.[81] Bespoke garments were excluded from the system, and many London firms that offered made-to-measure services attempted to side-step ceiling prices by showing garments that were 'not available to purchase', advising customers that they could have a copy ordered in their own size for a higher than ceiling price.[82] Unfortunately, this did them little good in the long-term, leading to a tightening of the rules that impacted badly on high-end made-to-measure firms, which were granted a retail ceiling price only 5 per cent. higher than that allowed to ready-to-wear.

The profit margins allowed by price ceilings were so small that many London manufacturers complained there had been little point in revoking austerity design restrictions in the spring of 1946, since design and embellishment were still restricted by the amount of labour and materials that could be used on a garment before it became unprofitable to make under low caps.[83] As a result of this, there are very few differences in cut and embellishment apparent on mid- to low-end dresses made in 1945 and 1946—before and after the lifting of austerity restrictions. The London industry was hit again and again by successive cuts in retail margins for high-end, non-Utility apparel between 1946 and 1947, as the government attempted to protect consumers from price rises at the expense of manufacturers, preventing garment makers from exercising the time- and skill- intensive techniques that had given London its reputation as a making centre.[84]

By 1948, London's garment industry was at breaking point as Utility clothes became unaffordable for customers and therefore unprofitable for retailers. For the first time

[81] TNA, BT 103/580; *Draper's Record*, 23 February 1948, 18.
[82] *Draper's Record*, 24 November 1945, 11; *Draper's Record*, 3 August 1946, 24.
[83] *Draper's Record*, 11 May 1946, 46.
[84] *Draper's Record*, 13 April 1946, 11.

since rationing was introduced, price, rather than coupon availability, took over as the factor limiting most people's consumption of fashion.[85] The government added more coupons to its May 1948 issue, including two special crimson coupons, worth six regular coupons each, that had to be used by 30 September. Even though many items were also downpointed—meaning that they could be bought for fewer coupons than previously—shops still reported problems clearing old stock.[86] The new coupon issue of March 1949 'came into circulation practically unnoticed and made not the slightest difference to sales'.[87] Clothes rationing was officially ended shortly after on 15 March, with the President of the Board of Trade, by this time Harold Wilson, admitting in the House of Commons that the system had been rendered ineffective due to rising prices.[88]

As stocks of unsold clothes built up, retailers began to cancel orders and manufacturers found themselves facing a position of overproduction for the first time since 1939. Figures from the Ministry of Labour and National Service show that workers employed in garment sector began falling in mid 1947. Rates of overproduction were particularly high for womenswear tailoring, and this sector (including coats and tailored outerwear) suffered the most dramatic decline, shrinking by 11,400 workers nationally between July 1947 and August 1948.[89] Womenswear tailoring was London's main output, and manufacturers in the city responded with reduced hours and job cuts for many workers. A NUTGW check on east London job exchanges in October 1947 revealed that over 2,000 garment workers were jobless.[90] The situation further deteriorated throughout 1948, leading to prolonged industrial disputes at the Harella and Ellis & Goldstein factories, where managers without garment orders found themselves in a stalemate with workers who couldn't afford to accept reduced hours.[91] By the autumn of 1948, it was clear that there simply was not enough work making high-end, tailored ready-to-wear garments by the established methods to sustain the former workforces of either factory, resulting in Harella employees accepting reduced wages and Ellis & Goldstein pushing forward with brutal job cuts and restructuring in their Brick Lane factory. For the many

[85] 'The Present Day Cost of Living', 1948. Mass Observation FR 3075.
[86] *Draper's Record*, 29 May 1948, 13.
[87] *Draper's Record*, 12 March 1949, 18.
[88] TNA, BT 64/4272.
[89] *Hansard*. HC Deb vol 448 col 55W, 2 March 1948; *Garment Worker*, November 1948, 206.
[90] *Draper's Record*, 15 November 1947, 17.
[91] NUTGW London Branch Dispute Records. Hackney Archives, D/S/24/3/16.

companies facing similar pressures as a result of austerity's impact on the London industry, there were only two choices: either cease trading or adapt their processes to the new realities of British fashion manufacture.

How London's fashion industry responded to the challenges of austerity

In order to survive in this increasingly competitive environment, London's makers up developed new production processes. London's elite makers turned inwards, banding together into protectionist industry groups, whereas the lower end of London's production chain adopted and adapted the techniques of mass manufacture, creating new making processes that embraced the speed of the city, the power of its brand, and the availability of cheap labour both in the city's outworkers and in new factories outside of the capital.

Looking across to the Chambre Syndicale de la Haute Couture in Paris and New York's Fashion Group International, it was clear that talent and well-made clothes were not enough to ensure the success of a fashion city in a post-war era of increasing global competition. Entities focused on organised promotion had successfully sold both the couture traditions of Paris and the new ready-to-wear output of rising American designers in the changed post-war retail climate and so, following the lead of the British Couturiers of IncSoc, a group of London's top ready-to-wear companies joined together to form the London Model House Group (LMHG) in 1946.[92] The founder members of LMHG—Brenner Sports, Jersey Co. Ltd, Spectator Sports, W. and O. Marcus, Rima, Rose and Blairman, Charles Kuperstein, Silhouette de Luxe, Frederick Stark and Simon Massey—were firmly rooted in the past traditions of London's small scale, high-end wholesale industry. Most had been formed during the inter-war ready-to-wear boom, and in 1945 still occupied West End workrooms, such as those run by Simon Massey at 6 Upper Grosvenor Street, W1, where '30 girls' made women's coats, suits and dresses.[93] However, in forming the LMHG, these businesses understood that they would need to adapt and change in order to survive in the modern fashion system. They focused on ensuring that the group raised the profile of London wholesale by promoting the city as a womenswear design centre through

[92] *Draper's Record*, 18 May 1946, 12.
[93] *Draper's Record*, 20 October 1945, 54.

coordinated fashion shows and publicity efforts, but they also lobbied the government for practical policies to help their businesses and manufacturing processes survive austerity.[94]

One of the first acts of the newly formed LMHG was to petition the government for raised price ceilings for high-end wholesale designers, arguing that the existing levels impeded British fashion both at home and abroad by stifling creative design.[95] The government had already been considering this issue and decided on measures that would create a separate category of women's ready-made non-Utility outerwear that could be sold above the existing set of manufacturers price ceilings.[96] This new category of garments came into effect on 31 May 1946, and could only be sold at the new, higher price if they were marked with a label bearing 'II0II'.[97] Although the LMHG cannot claim the introduction of the II0II label as their victory, they were remarkably successful at ensuring their members were registered suppliers and that the II0II label was, predominantly, a mark owned by London makers.

Unfortunately, the new clothing category had only limited success at promoting consumption of high-end goods. Only a very small number of registered garment makers were allowed to apply the label and qualifying to join this list was, to the frustration of many producers, an extremely difficult process.[98] As a result, the 'double-eleven' mark was only infrequently seen and is often confused for a Utility label in literature and exhibitions on this period, a mistake that can be traced back to inadequate public information about the label while it was still in use. As a result of poor consumer awareness about the new price ceiling category, many retailers reported that customers found the label confusing, asking why a Utility garment was so expensive, and on occasion asking that it be removed as they associated government labels with lower-quality goods.[99] Taking advantage of this confusion, some retailers tried to cheat the system by illegally applying the label themselves and raising the price of their goods.[100]

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[94] Tregenza, *London before it Swung*.
[95] *Draper's Record*, 18 May 1946, 12.
[96] *Draper's Record*, 20 April 1946, 11.
[97] Order 1946, No. 1748, Statutory Rules and Orders. TNA, BT 103/580.
[98] *Draper's Record*, 22 November 1947, 16.
[99] *Draper's Record*, 27 July 1946, 16.
[100] *Draper's Record*, 30 November 1946, 11.

In 1949, lobbying by the LMHG for the removal of price ceilings for high-end firms finally paid. The group's success at promoting their members' interests in the intervening years is captured in the details of the order that announced this change. Order (1949, No. 93), which replaced the II0II system (order 1946, No. 1748) on 1 February 1949, meant that price ceilings for articles of women's and maids' non-Utility outerwear ceased to apply to any maker-up whose name was entered on a special register, 'provided the garments bear the mark R.M.H.O. [standing for Registered Manufacturer of Higher-grade Outerwear] and the identification number of the manufacturer'.[101] The 17 makers listed on this order overlaps significantly with the membership of the LMHG at this time, including names such as Frederick Starke, Charles Kuperstein and Matita, demonstrating the power of the organisation to promote both its brands and London as the official, registered makers of high-end ready-to-wear for women.

Ultimately, attempts to implement exemptions from price ceilings for this select group proved confusing and unworkable as customers persisted in viewing the clothes as overpriced. Only a few months later, on 26 September 1949, following the ending of rationing, the government announced that price ceilings would be abolished on all non-Utility outerwear, ending the need for either the II0II or R.M.H.O. marks.[102] Yet it is likely that those unwieldy orders, in combination with the publicity and support of the LMHG, enabled several firms to continue profitable operations through the most difficult years for London's high-end makers, between 1947 and 1948. In spite of the confusion surrounding the II0II label, the quality and detail of garments produced under it helped preserve a wholesale making culture in London. This workmanship can still be seen in surviving examples of garments bearing the II0II label, which demonstrate clear evidence of construction techniques derived from traditional bespoke methods, including hand-finished hems and covered buttonholes (figure 58). While such techniques are commonplace in examples of London wholesale's high-end 1930s and wartime output, they are increasingly rare in garments from the post-war period as the majority of London making was concerned with lower-cost garments, increasingly dresses and skirts, and the firms that specialised in this type of production were adapting and innovating in their own ways.

[101] *Draper's Record*, 29 January 1949, 21.
[102] *Draper's Record*, 3 September 1949, 26.

Figure 58 (a-b):

Details from a Winbrandt Model jacket in navy wool, showing hand-finished shoulder seam and II0II label, and hand sewn worked buttonhole with gimp cord. Own collection.

Adopting mass-manufacture production techniques

As London's pre-war wholesale model struggled to compete in a changed post-war world, the city's making practices began to evolve and adapt to the changes caused by austerity. Mid-range London firms were increasingly adopting new practices from America, focusing investment on developing more efficient making processes and creating a design culture that understood how to minimise production costs by borrowing the simpler cuts and techniques favoured by mass manufacture in order to appeal to a cash-strapped public.[103]

[103] 'American Factory Production of Women's Clothing'. *Garment Worker*, January 1948, 17.

Perhaps the most dramatic change adopted from America is one that we now take for granted: the introduction of standardised, graded sizing. The American system of standardised sizes had been developed to fit the greatest number of people possible, based on average sizes drawn from a large amount of research of real people's measurements.[104] British ready-to-wear manufacturers began to adopt the American system of standardised, graded sizing between 1944 and 1950 in response to demand from retailers, who found that standardised sizing made it easier for customers to find items that fit them well, reducing the amount of alteration work that needed to be sent to store workrooms and so cutting overhead costs.[105]

Some West End tailors, who found work was slow in this period of austerity, ran classes for London garment workers in pattern cutting for American sizing, and London wholesalers not only began cutting according to these sizes (figure 59) but also to use them as a marketing tool, promoting garments under new brand names such as 'My-fit' (figure 60).[106] While this change may seem minor, it was significant since the adoption of standardised sizing allowed small London manufacturers to compete with larger firms who had gained market share thanks to Utility regulations. Since large stores and multiple retailers increasingly required uniformity in the sizing of the garments they sold, standardised sizing enabled buyers who might otherwise procure stock from one or two larger establishments to instead source garments from across a number of small firms in the knowledge that sizing would nevertheless be consistent.[107] This change also helped London makers of brand name garments enhance and build their reputations for manufacturing reliable, well-fitting goods, increasing their repeat custom and ensuring their importance to store buyers.

[104] 'Women: No Boondoggling'. *Time*, 25 December 1939.
[105] In a survey of British retailers, 80.8 per cent. noted that garments made according to standardised sizes for Dorville's 'American Size Dresses' range required considerably fewer workroom alterations in order to fit their customers than other brand dresses. *Draper's Record*, 21 April 1945, 36.
[106] *Draper's Record*, 28 July 1945, 50.
[107] List of buyers' requirements for suppliers. Bentalls Archive.

Figure 59:

Marks and Spencer label showing standardised sizing. MFA Boston. 2010.1409.

Figure 60:

'My-fit' label, c. 1946-1949. Lasell College fashion collection.

London makers also needed to make bigger changes to the types of clothes they were making. Many firms moved away from producing tailored outerwear in favour of manufacturing inexpensive dresses. In fact, mass production dressmaking grew in the capital to such an extent during this period that it resulted in a restructuring of the London branch of the NUTGW in July 1950 to provide space for a new dressmaking branch, reflecting a move away from the mantle and costume work that had dominated fashion manufacture in the capital for so long.[108] This new dressmaking industry was primarily focused on mid-range products which offered reasonable quality items in contemporary styles. These dresses were simple in their cuts, construction and materials. High rates of purchase tax levied on materials such as fur and silk encouraged makers to use cheaper cottons and Rayons, which were not subject to these rates.[109] The tight profit margins imposed by government regulations encouraged designers to create easy-to-make pieces that varied only slightly from basic block patterns. The uniformity of these garments was disguised with 'cheat' fashion features; as one report from 1949 found, 'because costings do not permit the extra yardage required by the ubiquitous loose flying panel, manufacturers get the same effect with a fold'.[110] Another favourite technique was to make a feature of a fancy collar in order to give the impression of a new fashion, different from the prior season's dress, while using the same basic pattern.[111]

Squeezed by lowered price ceilings, makers became experts in altering traditional making processes in order to cut costs.[112] Manufacturers gave skirts a half-inch, rather than two-inch, hem, used press stud plackets to replace side closures, sourced cheaper component parts and reduced the use of structural features such as shoulder pads.[113] Sometimes, manufacturers even eliminated entire construction features, such as back seams and darts, by using features such as tie backs instead (figure 61). Close study of a number of different dresses produced in London during this period reveals, beneath the bright prints and feature pockets, how similar these garments are in their basic cut and making processes (figure 62). The vast majority of the ready-to-wear dresses surveyed from this period in museum collections have simple skirts

[108] NUTGW Executive Board Minutes, 6 July 1950. Hackney Archives, D/S/24/3/9.
[109] *Draper's Record*, 26 October 1946, 45.
[110] *Draper's Record*, 4 June 1949, 23.
[111] *Draper's Record*, 26 October 1946, 22.
[112] 'Retail margins cut by 2 1/2 to 3 1/3 per cent. on returns', *Draper's Record*, 4 January 1947, 17.
[113] *Draper's Record*, 15 October 1949, 25.

Figure 61:

Enead/Garment. Book print Rayon dress with tie back to eliminate need for darts on back bodice. MFA Boston. 2010.1403.1-2.

Figure 62:

Red and white short sleeve Utility dress by 'Marylyn'. Its pattern is exceptionally simple, with integrated sleeves minimising the amount of cutting and sewing required. MFA Boston, 2010.1402.

and bodices comprised of two or three panels with front and back darts and side fastenings—a constructional model based closely around a basic flat block pattern. This indicates that the quality of the city's making processes declined significantly over the last years of the decade, with later examples commonly showing fewer of the construction features, such as interfacing, that help a garment retain shape, and even a reduction in the number of stitches per centimetre.

London's makers turned over their factory spaces to dress production at the expense of traditional tailor-mades, causing a reevaluation of what London's industry, and subsequently British fashion, was known for. Although the move away from women's tailoring in the post-war period is often described in terms of a fashion trend—a transition from the uniform-like suits of the Second World War to something softer and more feminine—it is noticeable that couture fashions still promoted tailored garments, and Dior's most iconic New Look style was, tellingly, the highly structured Bar Suit. The decline of tailoring in mass-market fashions was far more a question of economics than aesthetic preference. When Jean Guest lamented the 'Passing of the Classic Tailor Made' in her spring 1948 London Couture column for *Draper's Record,* she was strongly rebuffed by designer Digby Morton, who blamed the move away from the traditional London tailleur squarely on the economics of production—since a made-to-measure suit requires both a 'man tailor' and 'skirt fitter', it simply did not pay designers to include them in their collections in an era of rising wages and material costs.[114]

Although dressmaking offered a solution to economic difficulties for many London makers, the demise of London's traditional tailored outerwear presented a bigger problem. London was internationally renowned for women's tailor-mades, and many foreign buyers, particularly Americans, made the trip to London specifically for these items. With a changing output, London needed to be proactive in developing a new type of fashionable reputation.

[114] *Draper's Record*, 7 February 1948, 24; *Draper's Record*, 14 February 1948, 55.

Figure 63:
Gor-Ray advert, instructing consumers to 'Look for the genuine GOR-RAY label'. *Vogue*, July 1947, 105.

Adapting mass manufacture techniques and creating London fashion brands

London's mass-market garment industry was not content to merely follow the rest of the country in its uptake of mass-manufacture techniques, understanding that this would be damaging to its reputation as a fashion leader. Instead, the city's factories and workrooms adapted making processes and created new making cultures focused around the strength of London brand names, faster (and cheaper) production methods, and increased outsourcing of production to outworkers and out-of-town factories.

Perhaps the most significant of these adaptions was a shift towards the creation of more brand name garments. Following the Trade Marks Act of 1938, which had established a register and expanded the rights of trademark holders, there was more incentive for fashion businesses to use brand names to distinguish their products

Figure 64:

'Fashion-Sport Regd.' embroidered label. MFA Boston. 2010.1379-1455.

Figure 65:

'Fashion-Sport Regd.' matching blouse and skirt outfit in brightly coloured printed Moygashel. MFA Boston. 2010.1379-1455.

from others on the market.[115] In addition to this, the 'CC41' labels of the Utility scheme had familiarised consumers with the notion that labels were a reassuring mark of quality, and there is evidence that the public were increasingly brand conscious as a result. A Mass Observation report on 'Branded Skirts' from December 1948 found that people strongly associated brand names with quality and, even more importantly, consumers were more likely to buy a brand name skirt than an unbranded skirt if it was a name they were familiar with through advertising. The same report also found that London women, who were heavily exposed to advertising on public transport, were among the most likely to be brand-aware in the country.[116]

London firms enthusiastically adopted the brand name, with trade adverts for women's outerwear makers Dayella advising retailers to 'show your customer this label … she will recognise it as her guarantee' and Herselle Models encouraging consumers to 'look for the label'.[117] As the number of brand names grew, so did the size of the garment labels, until the colours and designs featured on the embroidered labels of London firms were often as eye-catching as the printed fabrics they were made from, suggesting that consumers could be lured to make a purchase by catching sight of a garment label (figure 64).

Establishing brand recognition through attractive, illustrated adverts allowed relatively small London firms to compete in a marketplace increasingly dominated by chain stores such as Marks and Spencer. Unlike Marks and Spencer, however, many of the new brand names came from small start-up firms that did not have access to the latest mass-production technology or benefits of long production runs. Comparing a Marks and Spencer print Rayon dress (figure 67) to one made by Springwear Ltd (figure 68), a small firm based at 20 High Holborn, it quickly becomes apparent that a brand name in itself is no marker of making process.[118] The printed designs of both dresses are delightful—the Springwear model is decorated in travel motifs in vivid primary colours and the Marks and Spencer dress features an interesting shell print. Both dresses also stem from remarkably similar patterns; in

[115] World Intellectual Property Organization, *Introduction to Intellectual Property*, 23.
[116] 'Report on Branded Skirts', December 1948. Mass Observation, FR 3070.
[117] *Draper's Record*, 18 January 1947, 12; *Draper's Record*, 10 January 1948, 5.
[118] *Draper's Record*, 1 December 1945, 52.

each case, the back bodice is comprised of one piece shaped with darts, the front is formed from two pieces, fastened down the front with buttons, and the skirt—made from two pieces—is given fullness from open pleats falling from the waist. But here the similarities end. The Marks and Spencer dress has clearly been made on a production line, with separate machinists completing different tasks using a range of machines. There is evidence that at least three different machine types have been used—a standard sewing machine for stitching the pieces together, an overlocker to finish the seams and a blind hemming machine (figure 66). The Springwear model betrays only signs of one machine type, with a straight stitch used for constructing the dress and a zig zag stitch used to finish the seams. Although final effect of the Springwear dress is just as neat as the Marks and Spencer model, it would have taken far longer to make up. To finish seams using a zig zag stitch required a difficult-to-operate attachment that moved the fabric back and forth as you sewed, which was a slow process.[119] As such, this dress would have needed to retail for a higher price, something that perhaps explains why the Springwear label is used to cover over the CC41 label that betrays it is a Utility garment, understanding that Utility was not comparable with the trademarked glamour it was trying to sell.

Figure 66:

Detail of Marks and Spencer shell print Rayon dress, showing stitching from three different type of machines. MFA Boston. 2010.1409.

[119] Singer, *A Manual of Family Sewing Machines*, 9.

Figure 67:

Marks and Spencer shell print Rayon dress. MFA Boston. 2010.1409.

Figure 68:

'Springwear Model' travel motifs dress. MFA Boston. 2010.1404.

Not all brand names concentrated on selling quality. Understanding that the cash-strapped public was hungry for fun and novelty after the relative stasis of wartime fashion trends, some London firms chose to promote themselves as fashion-forward but affordable, sacrificing high-quality making for a fast turnaround of the latest trends. The stylish nature of their output was praised within the industry, with *Draper's Record* picking a Utility dirndl skirt made by Art Skirt Co. Ltd. of Hackney as one of their 'fashion pointers' for January 1946, a spot usually reserved for garments produced by well known, high-end names.[120] It was the success of these new, low cost fashions that caused sales of womenswear in Britain to rise by 20 per cent. in 1948, in spite of widespread economic difficulties that year and stagnation at the higher end of the market.[121]

Figure 69:
Star frocks advert, *Draper's Record*, 18 January 1947, 53.

[120] *Draper's Record*, 26 January 1946, 19.
[121] *Draper's Record*, 9 April 1949, 65.

Star frocks Ltd was one such company that forged success at a time of austerity by focusing on style over substance. With its immediately recognisable red star logo, Star frocks positioned itself as a trend setter. The company ran large, full-page colour adverts that promoted the originality of their products alongside information about their low prices and Utility status. In some of these adverts, the company even went so far as to declare themselves as fashion makers, with the tag line 'Fashion foretold by Star frocks'.[122] This business plan clearly worked, with the company expanding several times in the late 1940s, hiring new staff to work at their Commercial Road factory in East London and opening offices and a new showroom at 316-318 Regent Street in the West End in 1947.[123]

In order to produce a high turnover of new designs for low prices, economical cutting and making up was key, as indicated by the appointment of a new 'improver cutter' for the Star frocks factory in August 1945.[124] A rare surviving example of a Star frocks dress from the collections of Lassel College (figure 71) further demonstrates the economy of their making process—both in design, cutting and making up. The construction of the dress itself is extremely basic. The bodice seams are unfinished and the skirt seams, which are more prone to fraying, are cut on the fabric's selvedge edge to eliminate the need to finish them.[125] The omission of shoulder pads is extremely rare for this period, with fullness at the shoulders created from large gathers at the sleeve seams—an enticing feature, even if conveyed more optimistically in brand's advertising (figure 70) than the finished product. The stitching itself is loose and long, showing that the manufacturers even went so far as to economise on labour and materials by using longer, and therefore, fewer stitches, and as a result of this low quality the seam has come down at the back of the dress. Still, the dress is both charming and quite different in design from other dresses of this type. The ruffled edging of the square neckline evokes an image of the post-war trend towards folk dress, while its full sleeves are reminiscent of the Gibson Girl look made popular by Hollywood films such as *Meet Me in St. Louis* (1944). This mixture of borrowed styles is typical of Star frocks's output; the company was known for creating new designs from a collage of cultural references that would have been recognisable

[122] *Draper's Record*, 18 January 1947, 53.
[123] *Draper's Record*, 3 January 1948, 25.
[124] *Draper's Record*, 11 August 1945, 46.
[125] The selvedge is the finished edge of a piece of fabric. It is tightly woven, typically for purposes of transporting unfinished fabric to a maker or shop, meaning it does not fray.

to its predominantly young and fashion-conscious consumers. The key to the dress's appeal is summed up by its use of a velvet-effect trim and Bakelite mother-of-pearl effect belt buckle, which evoke the materials and details of high-end fashion but at an accessible, purchase tax-free price.

Figure 70:

Star frocks advert, *Draper's Record*, 31 January 1948, 29.

Star frocks's production methods represent the manufacturing techniques utilised by a significant portion of London's post-war garment industry—which responded to new technologies and changing business models by concentrating on what the city's small scale operations did best—fast, flexible and responsive manufacture. Unlike the

Figure 71:

Star frocks dress and detail showing selvedge seam. Lassel College.

new production line factories emerging outside of London, which employed up to 200 machinists, each with a specialised task, London factories still commonly comprised only 10 to 20 machines, and an individual machinist would often complete the entire construction of a dress, aside from the cutting, pressing and finishing. London's machinists faced rising pressure from competition elsewhere in the country during this period. Recognising that it was increasingly difficult to compete with the large out-of-town factories and their modern machinery, London's workforce compensated with the overall speed and efficiency offered by an army of fast and flexible machinists, who could respond to industry demands and new fashion trends by turning over orders in a few days.[126]

By 1949, this speed positioned small London wholesale houses at the forefront of new fashions. *Draper's Record* reported with astonishment that 'Barely three weeks after the opening of the French couture shows a London wholesale model house has presented a collection of adaptations (Gobert Ltd.). This is probably the first time since the war that copies have been produced with such speed'.[127] This type of expedient reproduction relied on the skill of copyists who were able to memorise the details of clothes featured in shows and so produce ready-to-wear copies before the official press release date of the original. The extent of copying at this time so infuriated higher-end ready-to-wear and couture houses that a number of London couture houses asked for a deposit of £50 against the purchase of at least one model for all industry members attending their spring 1950 shows due to increase in numbers of designers who attended in order to copy styles without making purchases.[128]

Unfortunately, the making processes behind this fast turnover of new styles were often distinctly less attractive, relying on a much older production system that operated in dirty, overcrowded factories or by taking advantage of the low pay rates of outworkers. While a small number of London firms advertised images of new, bright and modern factories, such as the large-windowed factory and showroom of Diana Dresses on Tottenham Court Road (figure 72), into which the company invited retail customers to take a tour of their exemplary facilities, the reality of the working

[126] Newby, *Something Wholesale*, 121.
[127] *Draper's Record*, 5 March 1949, 23.
[128] *Draper's Record*, 5 November 1950, 29.

environment for most of London's mid- to low-end garment workers was very different. A report from the London No. 1 Branch of the NUTGW in 1948 found 'an astonishing variation in wages and conditions' in London.[129] Oral history interviews with Lily Silberberg, a cutter and designer trained at Barrett Street Technical School who worked in a variety of London workrooms from 1945 onwards, casts further light on the conditions that this lower-class of London fashions were made under.

Silberberg's second job after finishing her technical training was at Ackerman's, a firm that specialised in producing medium-quality dresses, where she worked as a fabric cutter before being promoted to pattern cutting. She describes the makeup of the workforce and the division of labour at Ackerman's in some detail. The clothes were designed by Ackerman herself, who also cut the patterns freehand, before passing them to Silberberg who cut the fabric. These pieces were then passed over to the 24 machinists—of which one worked an overlocker, one a pinking machine and two were hemmers—in order to be made up. Three pressers assisted with the making up, and there were also three finishers, who tidied up the clothes and made them presentable to be sent out.[130] She describes the dirty, crowded atmosphere of the factory as typical of the London industry, but also gives the impression that the machinists, predominantly employed on a piecework basis, found pleasure in their work, noting particularly that work benches were arranged so the machinists sat face to face, enabling them to talk as they worked, at their own pace, to make up their garments.[131] She also notes that, by 1946, a skilled machinist doing piecework could earn up to £15 a week.[132] In contrast, her next role was at Goodmans, a much newer factory on Old Street with better, and cleaner, facilities but much less scope for professional development or promotion.[133]

The quality of garments produced by the factory processes found in establishments such as Ackerman's was low, but in this period of rising costs even these producers faced pressures to cut further corners. Across established London businesses, there

[129] *Garment Worker*, March 1948, 61.
[130] An Oral History of British Fashion. British Library, C1046/02, 84.
[131] Ibid., 91.
[132] Ibid., 161.
[133] Ibid., 129.

Figure 72:

Diana Dresses factory. *Draper's Record*, 17 January 1948, 36-37.

Figure 73:

Rayon floral dress with uneven pleating. Museum of London, 67.39.

were fears over the competition caused by growth in small start-up factories—comprising of six machines or less—that were offering low-quality products at reduced prices in order to take advantage of the seller's market in which they were able to 'get rid of anything they could produce'.[134] In a bid to stay competitive, London makers increased their speed through even greater reliance on new making techniques, leading to a rising demand for evening classes in subjects such as power machining and machine embroidery—skills that were a far cry from the hand finishing and embellishment that technical training in London had previously focused on.[135]

The speed at which some makers were working can still be seen in extant garments, including figure 73, a floral print Rayon dress, however even in these mass-produced items we can still find hints of the individuals who made them. This dress represents the mid- to-low end of London's garment industry, as can be seen from its construction. It is unlined, its seams are unfinished, its hem hastily overlocked and the machine stitching around the back of the neck is distinctly wonky. Although this dress was put together at speed, most likely by a machinist getting paid per garment, yet there is creativity even in this time-poor making process.

Successful machinists approached their work with creativity in order to evolve novel ways to make garments as efficiently as possible. Machinists in London's small factories and workrooms were given a great deal of autonomy as to how they translated a pattern and ready cut pieces of cloth into a finished garment, with some firms purposely leaving instructions vague so as to slow down machinists employed on piece work contracts in order to prevent them finishing too quickly and looking for work elsewhere.[136] Much of the construction of the dress in figure 73 seems to have been done by eye, utilising fast freehand skills rather than laboriously following a carefully marked and measured pattern. This is particularly evident in the uneven pleating at the front of the garment, which looks aesthetically correct but, when measured, reveals that the size of the pleats varies by up to 1cm. The work of London's mass-market machinists was highly varied and rewarded workers who could reinterpret patterns to be made up faster. Although their employment was more

[134] *Draper's Record*, 11 January 1947, 18.
[135] Advert for evening classes at the Shoreditch Technical School for Women, Curtain Road. *Draper's Record*, 22 September 1945, 56.
[136] An Oral History of British Fashion. British Library, C1046/02.

precarious than their counterparts in large, unionised factories, this method of working allowed them to develop their skills and even to become familiar enough with garment construction to become fabric and pattern cutters.

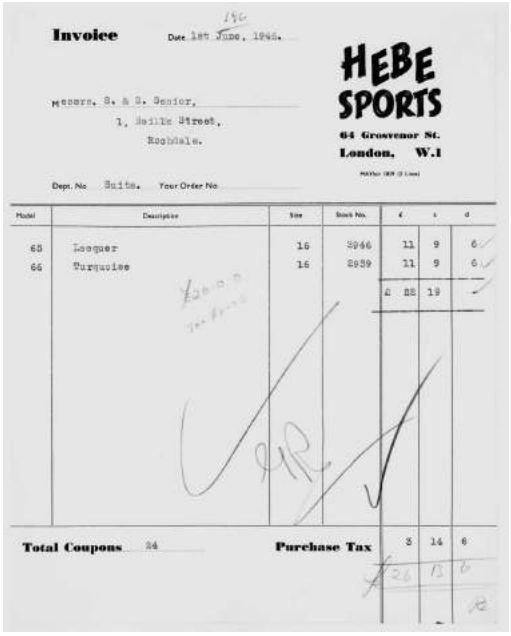
Outsourcing, outworking and out-of-town production

In spite of the skills possessed by their in-house staff, as wages rose, London firms increasingly turned to outworkers and home workers to supplement their factory workforces with cheap labour.[137] Outworking has a long history in London's garment industry. By 1834, it had developed to sufficient extent that it was worthy of a special mention in the Tailor's Union manifesto, which notes particular concern for the low wages of women.[138] The invention of the domestic sewing machine allowed cut-make-trim outworking to grow even faster, particularly after Singer sewing machines were made available to buy on hire purchase in the 1890s.[139] Successive government regulations struggled to improve homeworking conditions due to the hidden nature of the work, concealed within private residences, but outworking finally declined dramatically during the interwar period as a result of the move towards factory production and ready-to-wear fashions, which gave women the opportunity to take on better-paid in-house jobs.[140] However, post-war pressures on the industry saw a notable return of outworking in the late 1940s.

Adverts for outworkers in the trade press demonstrate that the increase was particularly concentrated in London and reveal that a variety of skills were being sought, from small subcontractors who were able to turn around large orders at short notice to individual dressmakers and highly skilled tailors, needed to plug a specific skills gap.[141] They also show that this practice was widespread across all sectors of the London industry, from East End sweatshops to smart dressmakers operating from

[137] The 1948 *Census of Production* defines outworkers as employees working in subcontracted factories or workrooms, and it defines homeworkers as those subcontracted to complete work from their own homes. These are the definitions used here.
[138] Hunter and Stewart, *The Needle is Threaded*, 47.
[139] Ibid., 125.
[140] The 1935 *Census of Production* showed that the number of female outworkers fell by a third between 1925 and 35, from 15,127 to 10,589. Board of Trade, *Final report on the Census of Production for 1935,* 400.
[141] Adverts for London outworkers, both for small factories and individual dressmakers, rose dramatically between 1945 and 1950. See, for example, *Draper's Record*, 14 July 1945, 50 and *Draper's Record*, 21 January 1950, 98.

Chelsea apartments and advertising on the pages of *Vogue*.[142] The small-scale nature of London's fashion industry, combined with the city's large population of skilled garment workers, made outworking an attractive solution even at high-end firms. In January 1947, Hebe Sports placed a small advert in the *Draper's Record*, seeking outdoor tailors capable of 'Highest-class work'.[143] The advert promised regular work, raising questions as to why the firm was not looking to recruit permanent tailoring staff. The answer can be found on invoices that reveal the sales pattern between the company and small shops, which provided an important segment of its national business. These shops placed regular, small orders, sometimes even for single products (figure 74), meaning that Hebe Sports could not afford to keep a large, skilled workroom staff employed on a mass production basis since they had few guaranteed large orders, but instead found it more viable to keep a small staff in-house and send work out at busy times. The high rents and increased competition for West End workroom space compounded the attraction of outworkers for companies such as Hebe Sports, itself headquartered on Grosvenor Street, making it far cheaper to expand using outworkers than to find new premises.[144]



Invoice Date 1st June, 1946.

HEBE SPORTS
64 Grosvenor St.
London, W.1

Messrs. S. & S. Senior,
1, Baille Street,
Rochdale.

Dept. No. Suits. Your Order No.

Model	Description	Size	Stock No.	£	s	d
65	Lacquer	16	2946	11	9	6
66	Turquoise	16	2939	11	9	6
				£ 22	19	-
Total Coupons 24			**Purchase Tax**	3	14	6

Figure 74:
Hebe Sports Invoice, 1 June 1946. Own collection.

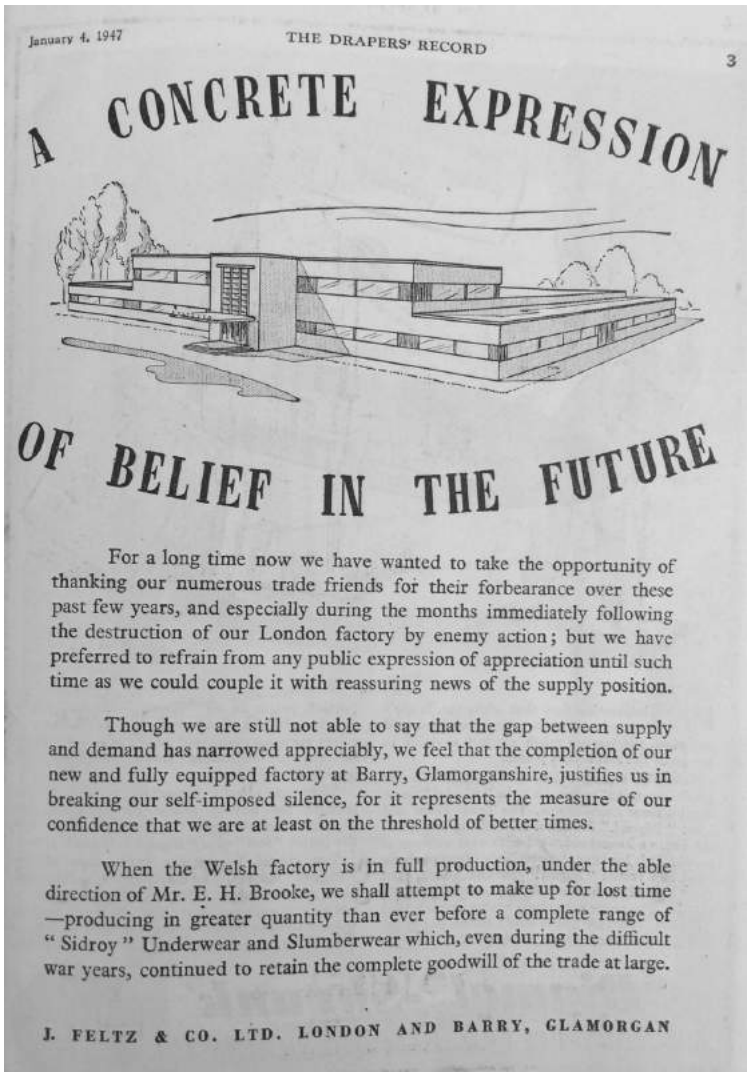
[142] See small ads in the back of *Vogue*, March 1949.
[143] *Draper's Record*, 3 January 1947, 66.
[144] *Draper's Record*, 3 January 1947, 67.

The 1948 Census of Production recorded a 26 per cent. rise in the number of female outworkers nationally as compared to 1936. While it is difficult to know the true extent of outworking in the post-war London garment industry due to the breadth of activities included in this category, it is likely that a substantial percentage of garment workers in the capital were employed on this basis and that the vast majority of them were female.[145] Part of the difficulty in tracing the role played by outworkers in London's making cultures lies in a lack of transparency, as the firms who relied on this practice undertook various efforts to conceal it from public record. Of 12 adverts for outworkers being sought by London firms in a single edition of the *Draper's Record* in February 1950, not one named the firm itself, choosing instead to hide their identities behind PO boxes and vague descriptive titles such as 'West End blouse manufacturer'.[146] In addition to this, the war had weakened union membership in London's garment industry, stifling union attempts to understand the scale of the problem and advocate for regulation.[147]

The problem of outworking was serious enough that the London County Council considered it in their post-war plans for rebuilding London. The LCC planned to build factory blocks in the badly bombed areas around Stepney, Poplar, Hackney and Stamford Hill—all of which had previously been home to large numbers of garment workers—in which they would 'let out workroom space on the residential flat principle' with the aim of enabling 'the hundreds of outworkers in East London to leave their backroom "factories" for commodious, up to date buildings'.[148] Although this plan never came to fruition, it highlights that London's local government recognised outworking as a greater problem than the national government, who consistently declined to regulate the practice in spite of demands by outworkers for 'signed pacts' with employers to control prices, avoid cut-throat competition and

[145] By far, the majority of outworkers recorded in the 1948 *Census of Production* are female—13,337 compared to 1,025 male. Board of Trade, *Final report on the Census of Production for 1948*, Table 25. Another interesting indication of the potential size of outworkers' contribution to London is the fact that it is estimated that in Paris, outworkers represented only 10 to 20 per cent. of all garment workers by 1950. Green, *Ready-to-Wear and Ready-to-Work*, 152.
[146] *Draper's Record*, 11 February 1950, 106.
[147] NUTGW London Branch Membership Records. Hackney Archives, D/S/24/3/13; *Draper's Record*, 22 March 1947, 16.
[148] *Draper's Record*, 9 March 1946, 52.

ensure continuity of work.[149] In fact, it is likely that government regulation, if inadvertently, actually served to promote outworking in London, with legislation such as the Ministry of Labour and National Service's 'Wages Regulation Orders', which fixed statutory minimum pay and paid annual holiday for garment workers from January 1950, furtherer encouraging firms to employ skilled makers as outworkers in order to reduce their financial liability.[150]



January 4, 1947 THE DRAPERS' RECORD 3

A CONCRETE EXPRESSION OF BELIEF IN THE FUTURE

For a long time now we have wanted to take the opportunity of thanking our numerous trade friends for their forbearance over these past few years, and especially during the months immediately following the destruction of our London factory by enemy action; but we have preferred to refrain from any public expression of appreciation until such time as we could couple it with reassuring news of the supply position.

Though we are still not able to say that the gap between supply and demand has narrowed appreciably, we feel that the completion of our new and fully equipped factory at Barry, Glamorganshire, justifies us in breaking our self-imposed silence, for it represents the measure of our confidence that we are at least on the threshold of better times.

When the Welsh factory is in full production, under the able direction of Mr. E. H. Brooke, we shall attempt to make up for lost time —producing in greater quantity than ever before a complete range of "Sidroy" Underwear and Slumberwear which, even during the difficult war years, continued to retain the complete goodwill of the trade at large.

J. FELTZ & CO. LTD. LONDON AND BARRY, GLAMORGAN

Figure 75:

J Feltz and Co. advert for their new factory in Barry, Wales. *Draper's Record,* 4 January 1947, 3.

[149] *Draper's Record*, 8 June 1946, 16. There were clear precedents for legislating against outworking during this time in other jurisdictions; for example, see a general ban imposed on homeworking in New York State in 1945. Green, *Ready-to-Wear and Ready-to-Work*, 131.
[150] *Draper's Record*, 7 January 1950, 81.

Another preferred solution to tackle rising manufacturing costs in the city was to move production to out-of-town factories. As a precautionary move amid warnings of air raids in London, the womenswear manufacturing firm Dukes and Marcus moved their factory from London to Kendal at the beginning of the war. They never moved back. Having weighed up their options in 1945, the company decided to make this temporary move permanent and expanded their production in the North East, opening a 15,000 square foot factory in Whitley Bay in the autumn of 1945.[151] For many companies like Dukes and Marcus, the future of British garment manufacturing clearly lay outside of London. The late 1940s saw a number of London manufacturers focus their reconstruction and expand their operations outside of the capital, which new factory growth particularly concentrated in Yorkshire and South Wales. The employment opportunities created by these moves can be seen in the plethora of job adverts for machinists to work at 'large' gown and coat manufacturers 'in the North of England'. What is less immediately apparent is the impact this shift had on making cultures in London's diminished industry.[152]

One of the key attractions for this decentralisation lie in the space available outside the capital, where plots of land were available to create modern, efficient factories sought by many producers—for example, as illustrated in J Feltz and Co.'s concrete vision of production line modernity (figure 75). London, by contrast, was crowded and expensive.[153] For Lewis Edwards, a manufacturer based near Old Street, attempting to rebuild and expand in an area of the city where the infrastructure was still so badly disrupted made expanding production to a large new factory in Maesteg, South Wales the obvious choice for growing their business.[154] The post-war property market also made long-term planning difficult in the capital; London businesses were hit by rising rents due to acute property shortages as the pace of rebuilding bomb damaged premises continued to be painfully slow, with three- to five- fold rent increases common for garment workshops between 1945 and 1947.[155] In addition, great uncertainty was caused by numerous cases of landlords selling premises without

[151] *Draper's Record*, 4 August 1945, 39.
[152] Ibid., 45.
[153] Numerous small adverts requiring factory space. *Draper's Record*, 13 October 1945, 54.
[154] *Draper's Record*, 11 December 1948, 9.
[155] *Draper's Record*, 12 April 1947, 24.

giving the occupying business the option to buy, forcing out manufacturers who were already struggling in the post-war climate.[156]

London had not only lost buildings during the war, but also many skilled garment workers who were dispersed to war jobs in other areas of the country. While a shortage of garment workers was a national problem immediately after the war, resulting in the government pleading with women to stay in clothing manufacture jobs in 1945 to prevent an acute shortage of labour in the industry, London firms complained that the problem was particularly difficult to manage in the capital since the output of many of its high-end companies relied on sufficient availability of workers with exceptionally high skill levels.[157] In spite of a decline in demand for makers with bespoke skills, the shortage of suitably qualified workers got so bad that, in 1946, Hardy Amies stated that London's export potential was being stifled 'not due to cloth situation, but due to a terrible labour shortage'.[158] These circumstances were only further exacerbated by the aggressive recruiting of London's skilled cutters and factory managers who were offered attractive compensation packages to relocate from the city to the new out-of-town factories.[159]

It was not just land costs that were cheaper out of London, but wages too. Wage undercutting was something that caused great concern to the NUTGW as they mediated a dispute between Windsmoor, a well-known brand of shirt manufacturers, and the workers employed in their London factory who were laid off when the firm relocated production to South Wales.[160] The NUTGW suspected that workers at the new, non-London, factories were being short-changed and launched investigations into how much less workers at regional branches of London firms were paid; however it was difficult to come to any firm conclusions due to the different ways that these modern factories operated in comparison to their London counterparts.[161] The rise of mass manufacture ready-to-wear, made according to a production line model as

[156] *Draper's Record*, 12 May 1945, 35.
[157] *Draper's Record*, 26 May 1945, 11.
[158] *Draper's Record*, 3 August 1946, 17.
[159] Exemplified by an advert for a factory manager for London womenswear house 'to open and develop new factory in the provinces'. *Draper's Record*, 14 July 1945, 50.
[160] NUTGW Record of Disputes. Hackney Archives, D/S/24/4/9.
[161] NUTGW investigates wages in Steinberg's London Factory as they suspect workers at Treforest Factory are being short-changed. 27 October 1950. Hackney Archives, D/S/24/4/9.

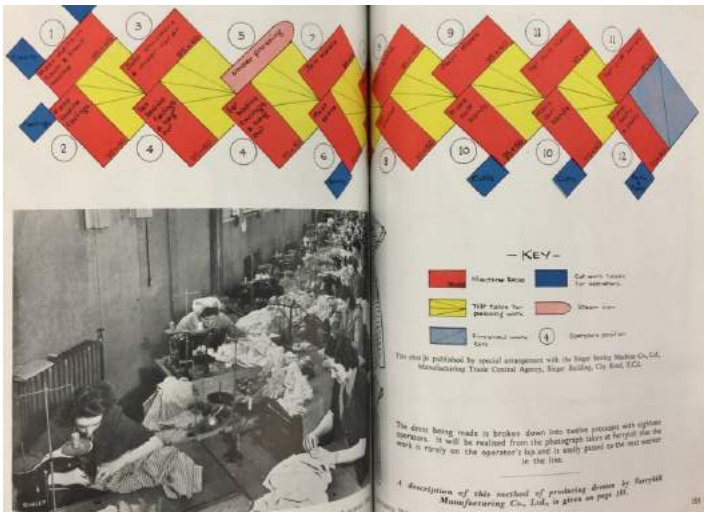


Figure 76:

Singer production line model. *The Maker-Up*, September 1949, 190-191.

Figure 77:

Slim-cut day dress in grey wool. Made in 1944 by Jersey De Luxe, a subsidiary of Messrs W and O Marcus Ltd of Wells Street, London W1. Museum of London, 45.15.

illustrated by Singer (figure 76), required a less skilled workforce, meaning that local, unskilled workers could be trained quickly—often by skilled garment workers from London—and then paid less than their city counterparts.[162] This model was employed by Radmar, makers of Rhona Roy and Graceline dresses, who used staff from their London workrooms to train local labour for their new factory in County Durham when it opened in 1945.[163] No mention is subsequently made of what happened to the jobs of these staff when they reduced their London workforce.

Mid- to low-end firms were not the only ones taking advantage of the capacity for mass manufacture and lower overheads outside of London, but increasing numbers of London's traditionally small scale, high-end ready-to-wear makers of coats and tailored outerwear too, including members of LMHG. It became common among these high-end firms to have a model workroom in London, where patterns and models were created, and large-scale regional production elsewhere. An example of how this process worked within London's making culture can be pieced together using the Jersey de Luxe model dress pictured in figure 77.

The construction of the dress is astonishingly clever. The skirt comprises four panels of fabric, slightly gored towards the hem in order to give shape while still using the smallest amount of material possible. Similarly, the careful positioning of the five darts used to sculpt the back bodice, which is comprised of a single piece of fabric, gives the garment a sense of structural tailoring, more characteristic of a bespoke piece than your average ready-to-wear garment. Although such features are conventionally attributed to the dress designer, in reality they likely owe more to the considerable efforts of a pattern cutter. Pattern cutting is the process by which an illustrated design idea is translated into a three-dimensional object. This highly skilled role involves breaking a design down into component parts—a flat pattern—that can be stitched together to form a garment. The role of the pattern cutter was particularly important in Britain between 1942 and 1946, when clothing was regulated by austerity design restrictions, which stipulated the maximum number of pleats, buttons and seams any garment was allowed.[164] This dress reflects the technical

[162] Advert for a factory manager for London firm, capable of training unskilled labour for a new factory in South Wales. *Draper's Record*, 13 October 1945, 52.
[163] *Draper's Record*, 21 April 1945, 38.
[164] Brown, *CC41 Utility Clothing*, 63.

understanding of garment construction required to 'cheat' the system and create visual difference from these standardising set of design features. For example, the vertical diagonal line that runs from the shoulder seam to the waist of this dress is formed from a fold of fabric that gives the impression of a tuck, a design feature prohibited under Austerity Regulations, but is in fact a constructional join.

The pattern this dress was created from was drawn up from the central office and workrooms of Messrs W and O Marcus Ltd, owners of the Jersey De Luxe brand, located in Wells Street, in the heart of the West End's wholesale garment district, but the dress itself was made 350 miles away at the company's factory in Hawick, a town in the Scottish boarders. The Hawick factory started producing garments for Messrs W and O Marcus Ltd in 1940 due to the blitz, and output was expanded there following the war. Staff at Messrs W and O Marcus Ltd sent materials and patterns up to the factory by rail, and the finished products were returned to London by the same method. Examples of the patterns sent from the London workroom of Messrs W and O Marcus Ltd to their Scottish factory still exist, and these rare survivals of industry patterns are covered in notches, line diagrams and scribbled notes—ciphers enabling the maker to translate the pattern cutter's vision into multiple copies of a garment without their presence.[165]

Although the entirety of Messrs W and O Marcus Ltd's production occurred outside of London, they retained their pattern cutters and model makers in a workroom in their West End headquarters. This is a reflection of the high skill level of London's workforce and reinforces the central role played by the creativity of London's practitioners in post-war fashion, even with the significant growth of British mass market industry away from the city. Crucially, it is not just the design and cut of this dress that is of a high quality, but also the standard to which it has been made, demonstrating that with new technology, appropriate training, and a carefully managed process, London firms were able to produce garments of just as high a standard by making them outside London as they could in the capital. London fashion could no longer define itself according to the high-quality output of its making

[165] Marked paper pattern pieces, c. 1945-1950. The Messrs W &O Marcus Ltd. archive at Herriot-Watt University.

cultures alone. As a result of austerity and its impacts on the manufacturing industry, the fashion city would have to forge a new identity.

Long-term impacts of austerity on London fashion

The long-term impacts of austerity on London's fashion industry are entwined with broader changes in manufacture and promotion, but the influence of post-war austerity policies can be seen in several structural changes that resulted in the rise of London as a centre of design rather than production. Indications of this shift from production to design can be seen particularly clearly in the changing nature of fashion education in the city and in the rising cultural capital of the London 'brand'.

As consumer demand for cheaper, branded goods increased and many London firms moved production out-of-town, the city's fashion industry needed to redefine what exactly was meant by the term 'London fashion'. The growing importance of clothes labels was entwined with rising consumer demand for symbolic, as well as material, value in London goods, leading firms to promote themselves through the activities, such as design, that still occurred in the city. This emerging focus on London's design culture can be seen in the way Harella, a high-end coat and tailored dress brand, promoted themselves through their changing locations. The London firm L. Harris Ltd. opened a large factory and headquarters in the late 1930s at 90 Goswell Road, E.C.1. They named the building Harella House, indicating that, at this time, they were very happy for their most prestigious brand, Harella, to be associated with an address in E.C.1. However, as the West End became increasingly fashionable in the post-war period, and L. Harris Ltd expanded production outside of London to a new factory in Halifax, the company needed to rethink the geographies they used to promote themselves.

L. Harris Ltd opened a showroom at 243 Regent Street in late 1947, and although they retained their headquarters (and design studio and model workroom) in Goswell Road, Harella adverts from the beginning of 1948 exclusively use the address of their showroom, describing the fashions they promoted as 'Created by L. Harris Ltd, 243

Regent Street, London W1'.[166] L. Harris Ltd understood that, in the changed post-war garment industry, London was being increasingly seen, and had more power, as an imagined and symbolic creative centre rather than one of technical production excellence. The company's foresight was rewarded in 1948 with an increased demand for their products and 20 per cent. dividend for their shareholders.[167]

Figure 78:

Harella advert, featuring Regent Street address. *Harper's Bazaar*, September 1946, 17.

The growing importance of the symbolism of London fashion can similarly be glimpsed in the marketing of numerous other brands, including one of British fashion's biggest post-war success stories—Horrockses. Horrockses Fashions were

[166] *Draper's Record*, 10 April 1948, 8. Before this, Harella adverts had made explicit reference to their Goswell Road factory. See, for example, *Draper's Record*, 11 January 1947, 77.

[167] Report on L. Harris Ltd annual general meeting, where it was announced that profits for the 18-month period to 31 December 1947 were £283,386, due to increased demand for Harella and Berkely clothing and increased production. *Garment Worker*, March 1948, 47.

launched in April 1946 by Horrockses, Crewdson & Co Ltd in order to capitalise on demand for their high-quality cotton fabrics. Although the clothes were made in Manchester and Congleton, and the fabrics were largely designed by a team in Preston, the clothes themselves were sold through and promoted with an address in Hanover Square, a site with strong associations for high-end London fashion, perhaps most notably as the one-time home of the couture house of Lucile.[168] The Hanover Square premises was also home to a garment-design studio and model workroom, and although the ready-to-wear clothes themselves were mass manufactured, the operations in Hanover Square were publicised almost as if Horrockses were a couture house itself.[169] Horrockses ran seasonal fashion shows according to a model borrowed from Mayfair couture houses and invited celebrity customers, including Princess Elizabeth, to the house to view the latest styles under the watchful eyes of the press.[170] For Horrockses, London's fashionable associations allowed them to promote their garments as cutting-edge high fashion, providing couture styling at ready-to-wear prices.

This symbolism was reinforced by the wider networks that made up the city's fashion system, including education and training facilities. Fashion education played an important role in London's move away from its making heritage, both as a result of the failure of the city's vocational education to keep up with the changing realities of clothing manufacturing and the growth of new organisations that helped London become known as a pioneering centre for fashion design education.

By 1945, many of London's vocational courses for garment workers were hopelessly out of date, teaching obsolete techniques that inadequately prepared students for the modern workplace. At Barrett Street Trade School, the curriculum included hours spent practicing laborious hand-stitching techniques such as fly running and pin tucks, and the school even offered French, the language of couture fashion, as an optional extra.[171] Students were trained with the aim that they would 'go in to the workrooms as young assistants', but bespoke workrooms where hand-finishing and hand

[168] Boydell, *Horrockses Fashions*, 29*;* Behlen, 'Lucile at 17 Hanover Square'.
[169] Photograph of the Horrockses workroom at 15 St George Street in Hanover Square, from *Fabrics and Fashions Overseas* magazine, 1954. Victoria and Albert Museum, 1000LM1193-01.
[170] Photographs of the royal visit to Horrockses, 11 March 1948. Betty Newmarch papers, Archive of Art and Design, AAD/1995/16/4.
[171] An Oral History of British Fashion. British Library, C1046/02, 68.

Figure 79:

Flat pattern cutting instruction at Shoreditch College for the Garment Trades. London College of Fashion Archive.

Figure 80:

Fashion students at a Victor Stiebel for Jacqmar show. Royal College of Art Archive, 65/3.

embroidery were still practiced were, by this time, increasingly rare.[172] As one ex-student recalled, 'What hadn't been taken into account, unfortunately, was there had been a war, there had been a revolution in the garment industry'.[173] The high standards and craft skills still taught at Barrett Street left students ill-equipped to deal with the realities of post-war factory work, most notably in the way the school still taught pattern cutting. Barrett Street persisted in teaching students how to cut from draping fabric on a stand, rather than to flat pattern cut from block patterns, which was by this point the ready-to-wear industry's standard method. Many students found upon leaving the school that their old-fashioned technical training counted for very little in the workplace, meaning that they had to learn an entirely different set of skills on the job.

London businesses considered the increasing disconnect between training schools and industry a real problem. In 1948, a report from the London Association of Clothing Designers and Production Managers criticised the lack of contact between garment makers and technical colleges. The report noted that the situation was worse in London than other English cities such as Leeds, leading to fragmented networks and missed opportunities for both businesses and workers.[174] The London County Council were also aware of the problem and in 1945 formed a committee to consider how to improve vocational training for London garment workers in light of the important role they hoped clothing manufacture would play in the post-war rebuilding of the city.[175] This led to a refocusing on teaching flat pattern cutting and techniques that utilised new technology, such as machine embroidery, at the newly renamed Shoreditch College for the Garment Trades.[176] Unfortunately, this local focus on skilling London workers was at odds with the government in Westminster, who consistently focused on the need to 'streamline the fashion industry' in the post-war era, pushing for a focus on British design talent and increased standardisation in manufacturing methods.[177]

[172] Barrett Street Trade School Prospectus 1946. London College of Fashion Archives.
[173] An Oral History of British Fashion. British Library, C1046/02, 75.
[174] *Draper's Record*, 18 September 1948, 61.
[175] *Draper's Record*, 29 December 1945, 40.
[176] Shoreditch College for the Garment Trades Prospectuses for the years 1946 to 1950. London College of Fashion Archives.
[177] *Draper's Record*, 3 January 1948, 20.

The government's failure to understand the connection between creative making cultures and successful fashion design resulted from their understanding of fashionable creativity as a top-down structure, disseminating from a small group of elite designers. This view was shared by Madge Garland, former *Vogue* editor and the first ever Professor of Fashion at the Royal College of Art (RCA). Garland oversaw the foundation of the college's fashion design course, which took its first students in September 1948; it was thanks to Garland's extensive fashion network and understanding of fashion promotion that the course gained an almost immediate reputation for creative excellence. The RCA fashion course explicitly fostered creative design talents, not craftsmanship or making skills, to the point where it employed 'craftsman staff' to 'reduce to the minimum the amount of purely repetitive work which students would otherwise have to do at the expense of designing'.[178] For Garland, ensuring London's future as a fashion city involved creating tastemakers, not skilled practitioners, and this aim was reflected in a curriculum that involved taking students to attend dress shows in London and Paris as well as providing the opportunity for students to host their own annual dress show—something Garland understood as an opportunity to sell the college as a creative hub, as much as to promote the work of individual students.[179]

Behind the glamourous presentation of this new fashion course lay an understanding of what the industry wanted. Students were lectured by industry professionals; they received instruction on cutting and designing mass-produced clothes by representatives from large firms such as Berketex, and the garments that were produced from the course were not couture gowns but summer dresses and leisurewear—staples of London's growing post-war ready-to-wear industry.[180] The successful results of this industry-led curriculum can be seen in student destinations, with graduates of the course regularly taking jobs as designers at high-end ready-to-wear houses such as Jaeger and Percy Trilnick, or as fashion journalists for magazines including *Vogue.*[181] The success of the RCA course at placing students with top firms highlights the elitism present in the post-war industry, restricting design jobs to those who could afford the training necessary to receive the right introduction. Day courses

[178] Royal College of Art Annual Report for 1949-1950, 4. RCA Archives.
[179] Royal College of Art Annual Report for 1950-51, 10. RCA Archives.
[180] 'The First Professor of Fashion', *Picture Post*, 19 February 1949, 25.
[181] Royal College of Art Annual Report for 1950-51, 20. RCA Archives.

at Barrett Street Technical School were free for those under eighteen, whereas fees at the RCA amounted to £60 per year. Although this ultimately restricted the talent pool from which London fashion design could draw, it highlighted the increasing importance of presentation and social aspiration, over technical skill, in the new symbolic order of London fashion.

In spite of the slick re-branding of 'London fashion' by certain firms and institutions, the simultaneous rise of London as a symbolic fashion centre and declining numbers of London-made clothes created something of an identity crisis for much of the city's industry. Branding and labeling became increasingly important tools with which to sell clothes via associations with the city; as a result, these processes also demonstrate how London as a fashion city was fast becoming a concept more than a tangible geography. Established London brands were no longer making clothes in the city, and this challenged them to rethink how they sold their fashions—how, for example, should London Pride blouses be marketed now they had moved production to a factory in Bridgend?[182] Many companies found solutions to this problem by placing the cultural meaning of London fashion at the centre of their brand message, following the model of Chester Barrie, who used the address of their Savile Row shop to give their ready-made suits, produced in a factory in Crewe, connotations of traditional craftsmanship. In doing so, they blurred the meaning of the word 'London' on fashion labels, and further undermined the marketing potential of the city for manufacturers still producing clothes within it.

The ensuing battle for the meaning of London fashion can be seen fought out on the clothes labels themselves. Some London makers strived to display the authenticity of their brands, reminding customers that their clothes were both designed and made in the capital with labels that boasted they were 'London Tailored'. Both Neeta Skirts and Doric models advertised the importance of this promise on their labels, proudly showing the addresses of their East London factories should anyone doubt their authenticity (figure 81). But these labels had to compete for an overwhelmed consumer who, faced with numerous other labels that also seemed to offer associations with London, must have found the geographical boasts made by clothes labels increasingly meaningless. Some labels drew on nostalgia and heritage by

[182] *Draper's Record*, 31 August 1946, 61.

Figure 81:

Doric advert. *Draper's Record*, 17 January 1948, 59.

evoking notions of a past history with the city. For example, wholesalers Cooks of Saint Pauls who chose to add an embroidered outline of St Paul's dome to their label, coinciding with their move out of St Pauls Churchyard. Other labels promised imagined, hybrid places, such as Valmajor's combination of visual signifiers of both Paris and London landmarks in their label design in order to heighten the perceived fashion credentials of their brand through the joint power of these fashion cities.[183] Some labels even bordered on outright deception—Marlbeck models, designed and made in Leeds by Thomas Marshall Ltd, used their label to transform themselves into a London brand during the post-war period. The company had a London showroom on Regent Street during the 1930s, but in the spring of 1947 they relaunched themselves in the press as a London brand, associated with their new showroom in Hanover Square.[184] Their labels no longer read 'A genuine Marlbeck reg Tailor Made', but instead promised that this was a 'Marlbeck Model 12 Hanover Square W1', in spite of the fact they continued to be a Leeds-based firm and the Hanover Square premises was, in reality, little more than a regional office and showroom (figure 82).

[183] *Draper's Record*, 25 February 1950, 42.
[184] Marlbeck annual reports for the years 1932 to 1955 and reports of committee meetings for the years 1946 to 1961. West Yorkshire Archive Service, Leeds.

Figure 82:

Marlbeck Model label. Lasell College fashion collection.

Figure 83:

Marlbeck advert, showing label before Hanover Square address. *Harper's Bazaar*, April 1945, 16.

The apparent importance to Marlbeck of a London connection in using the Hanover Square label offers a hint of the power contained within London's rising brand value. London's growth as a symbolic capital gained momentum precisely because it was not bound by the same physical barriers to growth as garment manufacturing. London could now lay claim to the fashionable output of other cities, cementing the idea that British fashion was London fashion since the capital drew together the nation's output.[185] Government policies to aid consumer confidence in British fashion—both at home and abroad—contributed to London's symbolic rise; they supported the attendance of trade shows and overseas tours by members of IncSoc and LMHG with the explicit purpose of elevating London to a symbolic status equal with Paris.[186]

The growing symbolic importance of London fashion had major, long-term implications for the way fashionable creativity was understood and where it was considered to be located in the city. Although the growth of London as a symbolic fashion city was beneficial to a number of British fashion firms, many city businesses lost sight of the creative value of their makers and fashionable making culture as a result. This particularly disenfranchised London's large female garment labour force, whose contribution to London fashions was frequently played down in favour of celebrations of a small group of (predominantly male) high-fashion designers, whom in turn had no qualms about reducing the talented cutters and seamstresses responsible for creating their designs to a cast of mildly comic supporting characters in their biographies.[187] This tendency had real consequences for these workers in terms of their pay and conditions, allowing those in power, including Chancellor Hugh Dalton, to dismiss the case for equal pay for women garment workers as unnecessary, imagining them to be entirely replicable should they choose to pursue other, better paid work.[188] Subsequently, it has also caused fashion historians to overlook the importance of the creative role played by garment workers in developing London fashion during this period.

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[185] This is similar to Tim Barringer's ideas about the role of the South Kensington Museums in the nineteenth century, when 'The procession of objects from peripheries to centre symbolically enacted the idea of London as the heart of the empire'. Barringer, 'The South Kensington Museum and the Colonial Project', 11.

[186] *Draper's Record*, 7 April 1945, 15.

[187] Amies, *Just So Far*, 147.

[188] Talk on 'the case for equal pay' held at Toynbee Hall Commercial Street E1 on 25 October 1947. Hackney Archives, D/S/24/3/7.

This chapter foregrounds the important contributions made by garment workers by looking closely at how they shaped the clothes they made. Looking at material objects not only helps us understand processes of production, but also offers access to lost and silenced voices that reveal an unpleasant legacy of classism and sexism that shaped the presentation of London as a symbolic fashion capital. Searching for more details about the lives and contributions these overlooked garment workers is, however, something of a challenge due to the lack of records kept about the making processes of individual machinists, and the impossibility of connecting mass-production makers to specific items of clothing. However, accidental survivals that speak of the rich culture of creativity and ingenuity in London's rag trade litter the archives. In the photograph and press clipping album kept by the Social and Education Committee of the London Branch of the NUTGW, it is possible to glimpse images of garment workers at play, showing that the majority of the members were fashion-forward individuals who used their sewing machines to make bold sartorial statements. A clipping from the Hackney Gazette reports on new season styles for autumn 1949 not from a West End fashion show, but from a ball for garment workers, revealing that these individuals were recognised as trendsetters.[189] On close inspection, even a scribbled note on the back of a list of trade union shops turns out to speak of fashionable creativity—it is an outline for a novel entitled 'One Night of Love in City Road', which describes itself as 'a moral tale of organisation set somewhere resembling the C&A workshop'.[190]

Perhaps the most compelling image of London's garment workers found in the NUTGW archive is one taken as members set off on a day trip to Margate in 1949. The homemade outfits worn by members of the NUTGW in a social setting (figure 84) demonstrate that the machinists, pressers and cutters of London's garment factories possessed considerable creative abilities. These clothes are smart and well-fitting, but they also come in range of unique and personal styles, unlike anything to be found in shop catalogues or adverts from the period. The diversity of personal tastes and stylistic influences on display speak to the importance of acknowledging the creative contributions made to London fashion by these makers.

[189] Press clipping from Hackney Gazette, October 1949. Hackney Archives, D/S/24/3.
[190] NUTGW London Branch Membership Records. Hackney Archives, D/S/24/3/16.

Figure 84:

Members of the London Mantle and Costume Branch of the National Union of Tailors and Garment Workers on a day trip to Margate, 4 June 1949. Hackney Archives.

Figure 85:

'Miss Garment Worker 1948'. Hackney Archives.

By acknowledging the agency of individuals to shape objects during making processes, even if only in small ways, this chapter seeks to foreground the important contributions made by garment workers—whose female, immigrant and working-class voices are too often forgotten—to the creative cultures of the post-war fashion industry. It also destabilises the creative hierarchies of fashion—which place high-end bespoke and couture making above mass-market ready-to-wear—by considering how closely making the latter corresponds with standard definitions of creative practice. Ready-to-wear makers producing economically cut products in a novel range of colours and styles clearly demonstrate both 'originality and effectiveness' in their activities.[191]

Acknowledging the importance of the individual creativity of historical garment workers has implications for the way we see the networks of garment workers across the world that support London fashion today. In an age of globalisation, where design and manufacturing are increasingly separated by oceans rather than postcodes, recent studies of Western fashion cities have focused on activities that have largely resisted offshoring, namely design and promotion.[192] But the clear importance of other types of labour in shaping post-war London fashion suggests that studies of the contemporary fashion city should look beyond the clusters of creativity located within it to consider how the creative processes of making that have been outsourced elsewhere still shape London fashion. Understanding how the interconnected nature of historic labour practices shaped London as a fashion city provides a fresh appreciation of contemporary garment makers, and histories of fashion cities that promote a greater understanding of the creative agency of makers could be used to raise further awareness of garment workers operating within the new international division of labour, who continue to be relatively invisible.[193]

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[191] Runco and Jaeger, 'The Standard Definition of Creativity', 92.

[192] See, for example, Martínez, 'How Antwerp Became a Fashion Capital', 2449–2464; Rantisi, 'The Ascendance of New York Fashion', 86-106.

[193] Crucially, this historical understanding has the power to breakdown the tendency for attempts to trace makers voices through complex supply chains to result in narratives that focus on exploitation and hardship. See Crewe, 'Ugly beautiful', 25. This risks reducing makers to two-dimensional figures only interesting in relation to consumers in the global north, rather than significant in their own right. For further discussion of the dangers of this reductive approach, see Daya, 'Beyond exploitation/ empowerment' and Pardy, 'Hien's shed'. Instead, making connections between the creative practices of London's historic garment workers and makers in Bangladesh or Pakistan today helps break through the geographical divide that fosters an 'us and them' mentality, prompting greater consideration of the skills and labour of these makers, and perhaps even encouraging consumers to ascribe increased value to the material products they produce.

Evaluating the impact of austerity on London fashion

Uncovering the making stories of extant garments destabilises many established narratives about austerity and London fashion histories. Making stories shed new light on the complex reasons behind London's changing fashionable geographies by evoking the individuals and processes behind the industry. The difference between the West End focus of fashion trade publications and the diverse geographies demonstrated in the data gathered by the *Census of Production* highlights that the way London's fashion industry operated at this time was far from straightforward, with brand name fashion companies relying on a network of outworkers, subcontractors and hidden factories. Looking closely at how garments were made is particularly useful as a method by which to assess the impact of austerity because it can help us unpick some of the complexities of these hidden networks and acknowledge the contributions made by those who worked within them.

Examining the materiality of making processes is a reminder that fashion is about shaping physical garments as well as designing, imagining, purchasing and wearing. Although the historic importance of clusters of skilled garment workers has been discussed in relation to high-end fashion elsewhere, most notably in Nancy Green's study of the relationship between Paris's Sentier district and the city's couture fashion industry, these studies do not pick apart individual objects in order to better understand the actual making processes that facilitate these relationships, nor do they adequately explore the fact that fashion comprises a broad spectrum of making processes, including mass manufacture.[194] Incorporating material objects into the study of making in London refocuses our understanding away from the familiar narrative about the struggle of British couture and high-end designers to promote their clothes and compete with the reemergence of Paris as a globally dominant fashion city.[195] Instead, it opens narratives about how austerity combined with the rise of inexpensive, mid-market fashion and in doing so changed the London fashion industry and what the nation wore in a profound way that would shape London's future as a fashion city.

[194] Green, *Ready-to-Wear and Ready-to-Work*.
[195] Ehrman and de la Haye, *London Couture*; Wilcox, *The Golden Age of Couture*.

Most importantly, exploring the impact of austerity on London's garment manufacturing industry through the lens of material processes demonstrates that a knowledge of making is vital in order for fashion historians to understand fashion trends. The post-war move in womenswear from tailored outwear, particularly skirt suits, to more casual printed dresses is commonly attributed to the influence of designers, including Christian Dior, and a desire for femininity in fashion following the masculinity of military influenced wartime fashions.[196] However, a study of material processes reveals that this significant shift in what women wore was largely influenced by the changing economics of production that rendered the womenswear suit too expensive to make at a commercial profit due to rising production costs and increasing competition from imports from North America.[197]

Extant objects demonstrate that the skills of the city's garment workers shaped what it was possible to produce. Since the cultural image of a fashion city needs to be supported by the presence of specialist makers in order to thrive, the creativity evident in the making processes of these garments highlights the importance of makers in attempts to revive London's fashion culture following the Second World War.[198] But this material evidence also shows the de-skilling that took place during the 1940s, as changing technologies, education and economic systems shifted the material output of London's womenswear industry away from tailor-made outfits towards simpler, inexpensive dresses. This diminished the unique making cultures of the city, paving the way for future outsourcing of production as processes of deindustrialisation took hold in subsequent decades.

Austerity shaped the way London fashion operated with long-lasting consequences. Although other Western fashion cities would be changed by globalisation in the coming decades, government austerity policies hastened the demise of many making practices in London. In particular, austerity policies that favoured the efficiency of large-scale mass production over London's small-scale workrooms began a process of outsourcing for fashion brands. It is perhaps notable that the language of modernity and efficiency that was employed by the Board of Trade in the 1940s would

[196] For examples of this narrative, see Breward, *The Culture of Fashion*, 191 and Steele, *Fifty Years of Fashion*, 4-6.
[197] Letter from Digby Morton to Jean Guest. *Draper's Record*, 14 February 1948, 55.
[198] For more information about the importance of specialist makers to cities, see Scott, 'Competitive Dynamics of Southern California's Clothing Industry', 1304; Gilbert, 'From Paris to Shanghai', 27.

subsequently be adopted by the proponents of globalised fashion commodity chains, celebrating a process that would end with the virtual elimination of British fashion making. It was also during this immediate post-war period that London brands learned the art of obscuring the production processes by which their clothes were made in attempts to raise their own status through connection to London's rising symbolic capital, and that the interested groups of London's fashion industry—including, of course, IncSoc and LMHG—honed their talents at promoting the city's creative capital at a time when it could no longer compete on grounds of production.

While it is difficult to directly compare the government's attitude to fashion industry to its treatment of other British industries, it certainly seems that fashion was considered a low priority. For example, while Board of Trade subsidies for raw materials, including the Utility Cloth rebate, stopped in 1948, Ministry of Supply subsidies for raw materials and assistance to industries such as iron, steel and motor cars continued until 1951.[199] Garment manufacturers did not benefit from financial investment that the government made in re-equipping some industries after the war, including important exporters such as cotton and aluminum producers, but also less obvious recipients such as the watch and film industries.[200] The government were also frequently slow to act on concerns raised by the fashion industry, and this lack of urgency held back the industry as it struggled to rebuild itself (figure 86).

It is possible that London's garment making industry could have fared better in the post-war era had the government understood its making processes more comprehensively. Prior analyses have discussed how Labour's policies towards private industry were chaotic.[201] Their relentless concentration on streamlining the fashion industry into a Fordist production model, enshrined in a number of official Utility policies, failed to understand the benefits of diverse production methods and competition between small companies for cultivating a strong fashion culture. The wartime narratives characterising the industry as wasteful and suffering from overproduction persist to this day, but it can be argued that these stem from a continued lack of understanding about how the industry functioned, which this

[199] Edgerton, 'Whatever happened to the British warfare state?', 97.
[200] Rogow and Shore, *The Labour Government and British Industry*, 75-76.
[201] Mercer, Rollings and Tomlinson, 'Introduction', 4.

chapter has tried to rectify. As Nancy Green has argued, the garment industry has a long history of being labeled as antiquated and backwards precisely because it defies industrial models of mass production.[202] Yet the small areas of London where successful garment manufacture has continued to this day are precisely those which persisted in small-scale production, focusing on craftsmanship and bespoke techniques, raising the question of whether London garment manufacture could have better survived the processes of globalisation had it not been previously weakened by the austerity policies of an unsympathetic post-war government.

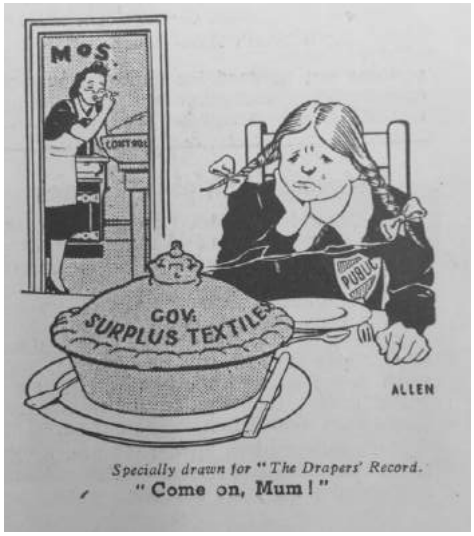

Figure 86:

The response to a 1945 campaign by industry groups for surplus war stock textiles to be released to manufacturers at a time of acute fabric shortages is so exceptionally slow that *Draper's Record* even saw fit to ridicule it in cartoon form. 'Gov. Surplus Textiles' cartoon showing Ministry of Supply tucking in while the public waits. *Draper's Record*, 20 October 1945, 41.

Although the post-war era was one of lost making practices in London, this chapter still finds much to celebrate in the diverse creativities and evolutionary resilience of the London industry. Yet London's post-war fashion producers went to considerable lengths to conceal the diversity of their production networks. Successful wholesale manufacturers advertised their new, prestigious West End addresses while simultaneously removing the locations of their East End factories from letter heads.[203] Smaller bespoke manufacturers sold their products by emphasising the traditions of

[202] Green, *Ready-to-Wear and Ready-to-Work*, 5.
[203] Dispute record for Harris Ltd, compiled by the NUTGW. Hackney Archive D/S/24/4/9.

their West End workrooms without mentioning the army of outworkers who enabled their businesses to function. They believed this deception was necessary in order to capitalise on the growing reputation of the West End as a creative centre, and their activities have shaped the way the symbolic geographies of London fashion are understood in popular culture to this day.

Instead, this research finds a far richer creative culture by reintegrating the distinctly unfashionable locations of making into the story of London fashion. Studying material making processes shows how London's highly skilled garment workers operated in conjunction with designers as part of the same creative production processes, connecting the cluster of brand headquarters in the West End to a much broader network of workrooms and factories and reintegrating distinctly unfashionable locations such as Walthamstow and Peckham back into the story of London fashion.

The benefits of concealing production processes are obvious for fashion brands during this period; manufacture was often far from glamorous, and it disrupted the sense of fashionable space so carefully constructed through labels and advertisements. However, it is important not to underestimate the fashionable knowledge of London consumers with regards to this branding. Outside of the factories and workrooms, London's fashionable making cultures existed in a wide network of informal making practices that blurred the line between home- and professional-sewing.[204] As such, it is likely that London's consumers understood that their West End fashions were not quite all they professed to be, but acquiesced to the deception as willing participants in a fashion system that produced standardised goods 'laced with the lingo of individual choice and self-expression'.[205] After all, the Highbury shopper on Regent Street who derived pleasure from the location in which she consumed fashion did not want to be reminded that it was actually made by her neighbour in a Stoke Newington workroom. In light of this, it is clear that the rising symbolic status of post-war London fashion was not achieved by the city's garment makers alone, but through their interactions with consumers and retailers.

[204] Although it was illegal to sell home-made clothes without a license or coupons, court records reveal that there was a large black market for informal dressmaking, usually occurring in people's homes and between acquaintances. For example, *Draper's Record* reported in January 1946 that 'For starting a retail business without a license and selling clothes without coupons, GRACE FRANCIS HOTHAM, Nell Gwyn House, Chelsea SW, was fined £400. She had two adjoining flats, one fitted out like a shop'. *Draper's Record*, 12 January 1946, 52.

[205] Ewing and Ewing, E, *Channels of Desire*, 222.

Archival encounter no. 5:

77.122/3: Dress with fitted bodice, flared skirt and Peter Pan collar. Machine stitched, hand finished. Made by the donor from bedspread material released onto the market in 1944, using a Butterick pattern

Figure 87:

Homemade bedspread dress. Museum of London, 77.122/3.

It is September 2014, and I am unlacing Tyvek garment bags in the rolling stacks, trying to match objects to their catalogue descriptions. Hung in between a hand-painted Norman Hartnell ballgown and a Hardy Amies suit, I locate a humbler item: a homemade dress, crafted from bedspread material. From each immaculately rolled section of piping to the precision hand-stitching of the buttonholes, this dress reads like a sewing manual. The collar lays flat, the fabric pattern is matched at the seams and its skirt falls evenly into a dead-straight hem. Its careful workmanship represents a considerable investment of time and care on the part of the sewer, suggesting that, if the maker was not professionally trained, they were certainly an extremely accomplished amateur who had worked long and hard to develop their skills.

Sewing and home-dressmaking during the 1940s is now widely celebrated as a key output of austerity and is predominantly discussed in relation to fulfilling a material, rather than emotional, need.[1] However, this dress demonstrates that the boundaries between pleasure and practicality are frequently blurred by extant objects made during this time. The care with which the dress has been made indicates that the maker may have derived satisfaction from investing time and energy into achieving technical excellence. It is highly likely that austerity shortages, exemplified by the use of bedspread fabric due to the unavailability of dress fabric, made it more difficult for this dressmaker to practice their craft. This may explain why, although the hand of the skilled sewer is clearly present in this object, there is no evidence that this dress has ever been worn.

Home sewing is championed as a practical solution to the shortages and difficulties of the era, and mending and remaking has come to represent a form of austerity morality that symbolises the determination and grit of the British public.[2] However, government documents indicate that the type of

[1] Wood, *'We Wore What We'd Got'*, 21-15; McDowell, *Forties Fashion*, 98; Walford, *Forties Fashion*, 130-132.
[2] Summers, *Fashion on the Ration*, 151

home sewing encouraged by the 'Make Do and Mend' scheme, such as this carefully made dress, required ample leisure time and means, revealing that 'Make Do and Mend', as presented in government literature and classes, was largely the preserve of materially comfortable housewives.[3] Evidence suggests that creative home sewing amongst the general population actually fell during the war, replaced by mending, before growing again after 1947.[4] In spite of austerity, 'Make do and Mend' was not always about fulfilling a material need for a new item of clothing. Even during a period of intense shortages, sewers derived pleasure from challenging their sewing skills and a sense of purpose from this performance of austerity. Perhaps the hours and attention expended by the sewer meant that this dress took on the status of a decorative, rather than practical, object, to be admired for the beauty of its construction rather than its place on a living body.

Figure 88:

Homemade bedspread dress, showing carefully hand-stitched buttonholes. Museum of London, 77.122/3.

[3] Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Austerity in Britain*, 121
[4] 'The £.S.d. of home sewing'. Mass Observation, FR 3085.

Figure 89:

Butterick shirt paper pattern, c.1944-1948. Own collection.

Five:

Selling austerity fashion

Figure 90:

John Lewis, Oxford Street after a bombing raid on 18 September 1940. *City of Westminster Archives*.

In the early hours of 18 September 1940, several high-explosive and incendiary bombs struck John Lewis's flagship store at 278 Oxford Street. Fire ripped through the store's West House and, aided by wind, spread across Holles Street to the retailer's East House, where it quickly took hold. It took 30 fire engines nearly two days to tackle the blaze, by which point the store was little more than a burnt-out shell.

Whilst Londoners grew accustomed to the decimation of familiar landmarks as the blitz continued, the destruction of John Lewis was the first major hit to the West End. As a result, the shop's smoldering carcass became a potent symbol of London's bomb damage, described by journalist Kingsley Martin as being 'like the ruins of a Greek temple'—a reverence perhaps due in part to the importance placed on West End retailers as symbolic sites for London fashion.[1] Although part of John Lewis's East House reopened as a makeshift retail space only three weeks later, the building of the West House was beyond repair. It remained a conspicuous bombsite until 1954, casting the shadow of war damage over Oxford Street throughout the immediate post-war years and leaving the city's fashionable consumers uprooted in temporary accommodation.

It is easy to forget that, amidst the drama of such arresting images of bomb rubble and ruins, it was not just the destruction of buildings that changed the experience of shopping for clothes in London in the first half of the 1940s. From routine blackouts to blast damage that resulted in darkened and boarded-up display windows, the extent of aerial bombing between 1940 and 1945 seriously limited the ability of retailers to promote, display and sell fashion. In addition to these obvious visible changes, the war also had subtler but profound long-term effects on fashion retail in the city. As discussed in the previous chapter, the changing nature and output of clothing manufacture (both locally and nationally) altered the meaning of London fashion. The city's retailers were compelled to adapt their promotional techniques for selling these new types of branded, ready-to-wear clothes. They also had to renegotiate how they used the symbolism of place to sell fashion, as the changing make-up of London's garment industry challenged the idea of the city—and particularly the West End—as a fashionable destination because it undermined the area's associations with skilled retail bespoke and made-to-order making. This

[1] Thomas, 'The Blitz: Oxford Street's Store Wars'.

required careful consideration of how to use promotional activities to sell the heritage and prestige of London fashion through a changed material product.

This chapter explores how London retailers took on these challenges at a time of limitations and shortages and asks how wider austerity cultures shaped their responses to London's changing fashion networks. In particular, it focuses on the promotional techniques employed by department stores, which were increasingly losing market share of fashion sales to multiple retailers (or chain stores) and were, as a result, under tremendous pressure to innovate in response to the changing retail climate.[2] This chapter draws on the retail trade press and research conducted in a number of different retail and business archives in order to understand how department stores responded by focusing on methodologies that heightened the prestige of their fashion departments by cultivating a sense of exclusivity and encouraging customers to view their products as aspirational. While the decisions made by display managers and department heads are not often central to accounts of austerity shopping, they can be glimpsed in the small details of surviving photographs and press clippings. Looking closely at these archival sources reveals the importance of seemingly unassuming changes such as how staff were dressed, how shop window displays were styled, and even the new colours chosen for dressing room lighting.

Tracing developments in post-war retail spectacle is not always easy due to the transient and impermanent nature of visual merchandising and events, as well as the lack of consistent record-keeping by businesses as a result of paper shortages and other concerns at the time. Indeed, few businesses retained records relating to their frequently changing displays, and even fewer kept evidence relating to the strategy and rationale behind visual merchandising decisions. To compound this problem, only a small number of the businesses that recorded aspects of their publicity strategies have archives that have survived the many retail mergers, acquisitions and insolvencies of the past 70 years. Where historical research and archival evidence does exist, it is primarily found in histories covering the collections of national retail groups and multiple retailers; as such, this record is rarely considered or studied with

[2] Womenswear sales by multiple retailers grew by 27 per cent. nationally between 1949 and 1950, while comparable sales at department stores remained steady. Plant and Fowler, 'Report on Department Store Trading 1951', 5.

any focus on particular geographic areas. However, evidence of innovation and change in London stores does survive in disjointed fragments scattered across a variety of archival sources. By bringing together these fragments—from the scribbled notes between a store manager and display designer, to the chance photograph or newspaper clipping featuring a display, or visual merchandising advice in staff newsletters—a picture of a dynamic publicity culture emerges. This chapter uses these sources to reconstruct a sense of the materiality of the shopping experience, considering the effect of lighting, music and store design on the way shoppers encountered fashion in-store.

In order to investigate how the promotion of fashion goods by certain London retailers was impacted by the austerity conditions of post-war Britain, this study combines analysis of surveys by the Retail Distributor's Association with research in department store archives and in the personal archives of display managers Eric Lucking of Liberty & Co. and Natasha Kroll of Simpson's of Piccadilly. These are considered in the context of sources relating to the changing nature of the British fashion industry, such as the national *Census of Production*, in order to understand the various influences and pressures shaping the decisions made by retailers and display managers. This discussion also incorporates evidence from the retail trade press, bringing together the text and images that influenced austerity-era practitioners and recorded archival evidence of the resulting displays and events. *Display* magazine (later titled *Display, Design and Presentation*) has proved to be a particularly vital resource in linking changing trends in London to both international retail developments and British austerity regulations, since its monthly publications—which offered display practitioners pictorial and narrative explanations of new techniques—provide informative commentary and documentary examples of how visual merchandising methodologies were changing during this period.[3]

The very existence of *Display* demonstrates that wartime disruption forced retailers to pay greater attention to the theory behind selling fashion. *Display* was a 1943 relaunch of an earlier publication, *The merchants & window display record* (first published in 1919), and came as a response to the increasingly difficult situation faced

[3] *Display* magazine was published in London under various titles between 1919 and 1976. It was titled *Display* between April 1945 and March 1946, and *Display Design & Presentation* between April 1946 and April 1951.

by retailers as the war dragged on. This newly titled and revamped publication aimed to educate the retail and advertising industries about ways to cope with shortages and regulations, as well as how to plan for a post-war austerity-free future.[4] In the immediate post-war years, *Display'*s primary focus developed along this informative theme, informing retailers of new methodologies for selling new types of goods. It was also during this time that the publication developed a particular interest in the promotion of ready-to-wear clothes.[5] Mirroring this interest, this chapter looks at how ideas of fashionable retail spectacle were negotiated and reimagined as a result of austerity in order to explore the intersection between the changing mechanics of London production and consumption in the aftermath of the war.

This chapter begins with an overview that details how wartime and austerity changes to manufacturing and retailing impacted the selling of fashion, including the shift towards ready-to-wear, after which it is split into case studies of two separate but inter-connected geographical areas—the city centre and the suburb. The first of these case studies considers how West End department stores responded to austerity by turning away from the large-scale promotions and events seen in the interwar years in order to create new, more restrained types of spectacle through innovative visual merchandising and events. By examining the aesthetic details of window displays, departmental décor and promotional events, it explains how stores successfully used such activities to sell clothes and, less directly but no less significantly, ideas of London fashion. The second case study moves to less familiar territory, moving out from the historic centre of London retail to the growing south west suburbs in order to examine how the conditions of post-war London made space for suburban retailers to challenge the supremacy of the West End in an inversion of traditional metropolitan retail hierarchies. Taking the case of Bentalls, a successful department store on the fringes of Surrey, it considers the changing relationship between inner and outer London fashion retail at this time of rising middle-class suburban prosperity. Through these case studies, the second section of the chapter explores the subtle differences between the centre and suburb in terms of how accessibility, ownership and customer loyalty were utilised to sell clothes. Discussing these spaces side by side

[4] *Display*, July 1943, 8.
[5] *Display*'s coverage is particularly valuable because it focuses on the West End's large department stores, which primarily sold everyday ready-to-wear clothing, providing an important counterpoint to the many studies of fashion retail from this period that cover London's couture dressmaking and bespoke tailoring industries; see, for example, Ehrman and De La Haye, *London Couture.*

creates room to consider the networks that connect the different spaces of fashion retail in the city and the various ways in which the material experience of each is purposefully constructed by retailers in their attempts to maximise sales.

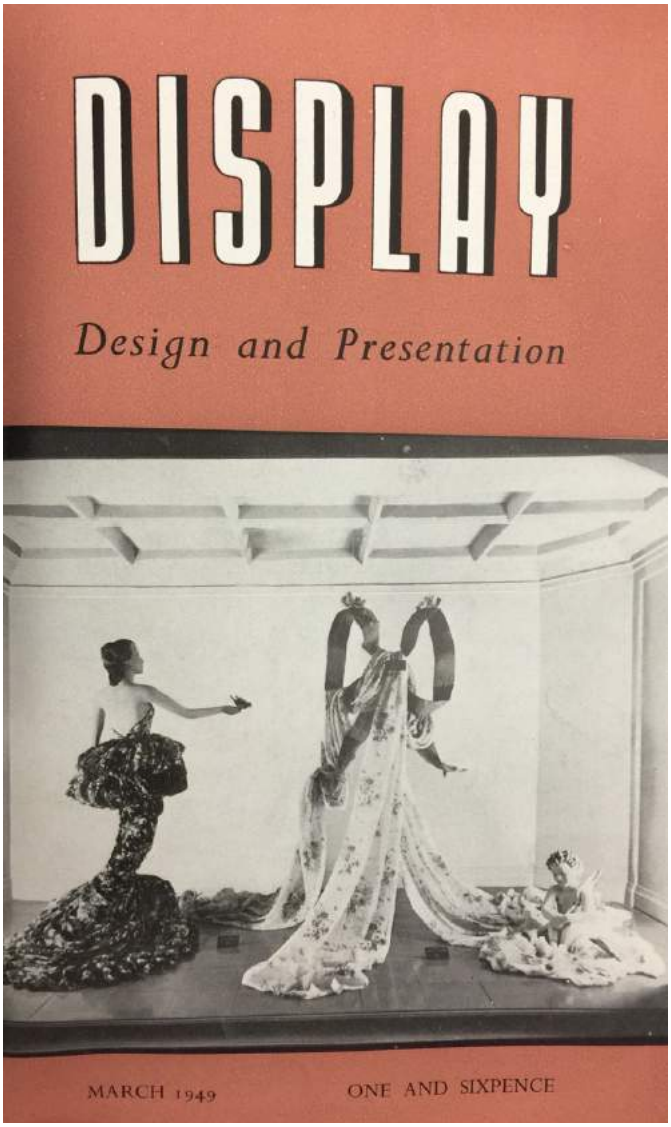

Figure 91:
Display, Design and Presentation, March 1949, cover page.

Beyond bomb rubble and boarded windows: rethinking the impact of austerity on fashion retail

The arrival of peace freed London's fashion retailers from the uncertainty of bombing, but it could not mean a return to old ways of selling fashions for many of London's most prestigious department stores. On top of the national problems of stock shortages and the slow pace of fashionable change that resulted from the government's Utility Apparel Orders, these stores also had to contend with local changes to production. The war had accelerated trends in garment manufacture that negatively impacted the city's high-medium end retailers. London's fashionable reputation had been built upon its concentration of high-end garment producers, specialising in retail bespoke tailoring and dressmaking and, prior to the war, these services could be found in the majority of high-end London department stores.[6] Unfortunately for London retailers, the rapid growth in mass manufacture that resulted from Utility and austerity regulations hit their bespoke workrooms hard.[7]

The declining importance of London's retail bespoke industry during this period is often concealed by fashion history's focus on the very high end of the industry. The post-war revival of London couture has been widely discussed and attributed to the return of the London season and the successful marketing of British clothes for export, particularly through IncSoc's promotion of its members and the marketing of Savile Row heritage to overseas (and especially American) buyers.[8] The growth of new British houses, such as Hardy Amies, has also been explored in detail through accounts that note their successful marketing of the 'Britishness' of British fashion by focusing on traditional fabrics such as tweeds and publicising associations with members of the royal family.[9] But this focus on the very top of the industry obscures some of the more fundamental, long-term impacts of austerity on London retail.

[6] Different stores offered varying degrees of customisation for bespoke or made-to-measure garments in their workrooms. Usually, these were based on pre-designed patterns or styles and made-up with fabric of the customer's choice.
[7] From 1935 to 1948, the number of people employed in retail bespoke garment making across the U.K. fell by 47.8 per cent. HMSO, *Final report on the Census of Production for 1948*, Table 8. The majority of London's clothing output remained retail bespoke throughout 1930s and 1940s, even as this declined as percentage of national output. See *Final report on the Census of Production for 1931*, *Final report on the Fifth Census of Production for 1935* and *Final report on the Census of Production for 1948*; see also TNA BT 64/2198 and BT 64/735, Board of Trade policies on purchase tax.
[8] Kim, 'United States & Canada'; 224. Murphy, 'Couture & The British Court', 257; Walker, *The Savile Row Story,* 106.
[9] Pick, *Hardy Amies*, 74.

Wartime economic and social conditions made shops ever-more reliant on ready-to-wear revenues. As a result, retailers struggled to maintain adequate stock of ready-to-wear garments at a time of fabric shortages. Inventories of ready-to-wear clothing in Central London shops was at an all-time low by May 1945, and they would linger at these levels until late 1947.[10] Further, retailers faced increasingly squeezed profit margins as a result of retail price ceilings on fashion goods, through which the government attempted to control inflation by limiting the profit levels that could be made on each item sold.[11]

Changes to what was being sold inevitably impacted experiences of shopping in London. Department stores are not simply places in which customers are passive participants in the process of buying goods, but spaces in which individuals identify themselves and negotiate their relationships to wider society, and the war had disrupted the way people related to these spaces.[12] Beyond the obvious physical changes to the city's shopping districts due to bomb damage, people's day-to-day sartorial requirements were altered by wartime conscription and employment. At the same time, rationing and government controls restricted the selection of styles available to choose from and limited the ability of shoppers with larger disposable incomes to purchase large numbers of new garments each season.[13] In addition to these influences, the arrival of peace in 1945 brought a need to reevaluate what a fashionable outfit should consist of, since many that wore a uniform during the war years were not necessarily keen to return to pre-war ways of shopping and dressing.[14]

Established consumption patterns were further disrupted by changes to the spending power of different demographics. The 1946 National Insurance Act and post-war changes to taxation squeezed the incomes of the middle- and upper-classes, meaning that salary-earners were 'on average considerably worse off' in 1950 than they had been in 1938.[15] The impact of this was compounded by high rates of purchase tax on

[10] *Draper's Record*, 16 May 1945, 15.
[11] TNA BT 103/580, Retail Price Ceilings legislation.
[12] Miles, *Spaces for Consumption*, 184.
[13] Howell, *Wartime Fashion*, 109-123.
[14] Newspapers featured numerous articles instructing newly demobbed women on how everyday fashions had changed since 1939—with slight exaggeration—and what pieces would be wise fashion investments for the future. 'Clothing fears of girls in uniform'. *The Observer*, 6 May 1945.
[15] Worswick and Ady, *The British Economy 1945-1950*, 49.

a number of fashionable goods and this duel tax burden resulted in many upper-middle class consumers feeling pushed out of fashion. The sales figures from Peter Jones demonstrate that these financial pressures even affected previously comfortable consumers from Kensington and Chelsea, with the store reporting a drop of nearly £1 per average transaction in the fashion department in the year between January 1950 and 1951.[16] In response to this deterioration in spending power, management instructed staff to highlight the good value offered by price reductions, and to refocus their stock procurement away from expensive garments to cheaper ready-to-wear items. Meanwhile, at Marks and Spencer this pressure inspired a renewed agency to raise standards of customer service to help ease the impact of these changes to shopping habits.[17]

Faced with restless customers, increasingly fed-up with stock shortages and shabby stores, and with significant regulatory and pricing burdens, it became clear that London retailers needed to think creatively about what form the promotion of fashion goods should take in a changed post-war world.[18] But this process of reconstructing consumer cultures in London would begin under exceptionally challenging circumstances for retailers. Grand rebuilding plans had to be put on hold while labour and materials were employed building housing for those displaced by bomb damage; staff who returned from service were out of practice and in need of training; promotional activities were curtailed by limitations on print material, lighting and construction materials; and, perhaps most difficult of all, shops simply did not have the variety of stock the customer wanted.

In order to reestablish their role in London's retail hierarchy in this difficult economic environment, department stores needed to reexamine and reimagine the ways that they used publicity, merchandising and spectacle to sell fashion. It is clear from

[16] Average transactions dropped from £6.10.10 to £5.12.10 in the year between January 1950 and January 1951. John Lewis Archive, 268/9.
[17] Marks and Spencer's *Training News Bulletin*, a friendly but informative monthly publication for staff of all levels, focused on educating staff in technical knowledge about clothes, rather than trends, in the hope of attracting sales. The *Training News Bulletin* advised on the proper way to measure a customer and how to fit clothes, but also on a range of other issues that represent some of the changes in ready-to-wear that the retailers had to respond to. For example, staff were instructed in economics and taxation policies, informed of the new standardised sizing marks in clothing, and educated as to the merits of various new fabrics such as Nylon, Dupion, Rayon and Marspun.
[18] *Display Design & Presentation*, July 1948, 7.

business records that fashion was seen as a growth area for department stores. Many expanded their fashion departments, including Marks and Spencer and Galeries Lafayette, which opened a forth fashion floor on Regent Street in September 1947.[19] The pressures of operating these enlarged departments under continuing austerity conditions heightened the need for retailers to modernise their trading practices in order to remain profitable. In addition, new ways of making clothes (as discussed in chapter four) demanded new ways of selling them, such as changes to the layout of retail spaces, the role of shop staff and the aim and scope of visual merchandising and window displays.

The growth in sales of branded goods, driven by new manufacturing processes and the increasingly direct relationship between manufacturers and retailers, prompted many of the experimental practices seen in the retail promotion of fashion goods at this time. The number of firms producing branded womenswear lines—as opposed to unbranded wholesale garments into which the retailer added labels as required—increased 33 per cent. between 1939 and 1952, and this needed to be reflected in the use of branded goods in department store adverts, window displays and promotions.[20]

Large stores and fashion brands entered into partnerships that, in many cases, appear to have been mutually beneficial. By teaming up, they could leverage aggregated publicity and afford to take out a greater number of illustrated adverts in newspapers and high-end fashion magazines, bolstering the reputations of both brand and store. Consumer demand for branded clothing stemmed from an association between advertised brand names and quality, a response to the historically poor quality of much unbranded wholesale ready-to-wear clothing.[21] By advertising the branded garment in association with a prominent local or national store, retailers were able to reassure customers making the transition from made-to-measure to ready-to-wear of the quality of the clothes stocked in their stores.[22] These mutual reputational

[19] The lower sales floor of Marks and Spencer's Marble Arch store was enlarged in 1950 to give an extra 2,000 square feet of selling space. Marks and Spencer Archive, P2/87/174. Galeries Lafayette's new fashion floor was celebrated in *Display*, September 1947, 36.
[20] Boydell, *Horrockses Fashions*, 111.
[21] 'Branded skirts', 1948. Mass Observation, FR 3070.
[22] While the arrival of mass-manufactured branded goods was celebrated by retailers, it is important to note that this apparent influx does not necessarily reflect the experience of London consumers. Mass

benefits also supported a trend that saw department stores devoting entire window displays to particular brands. Peter Robinson marked the very wet spring of 1951 with a display of select Dannimac raincoats in a range of different colours (figure 92), rather than showing a broad array of the different (branded and unbranded) rain coats they had in stock.[23]

Some stores that stocked own-brand garments, such as John Lewis, attempted to maintain a careful balance between promoting prestigious brand names and their own labels, whereas others focused on copying the techniques used by the big brands.[24] Marks and Spencer undertook a variety of initiatives in attempts to raise the status of their own brand clothing by relaunching their St Michael brand with a new friendlier logo in a hand-written style and a publicity campaign about the retailer's stringent quality controls and development of one of the most advanced textile research laboratories in the country.[25]

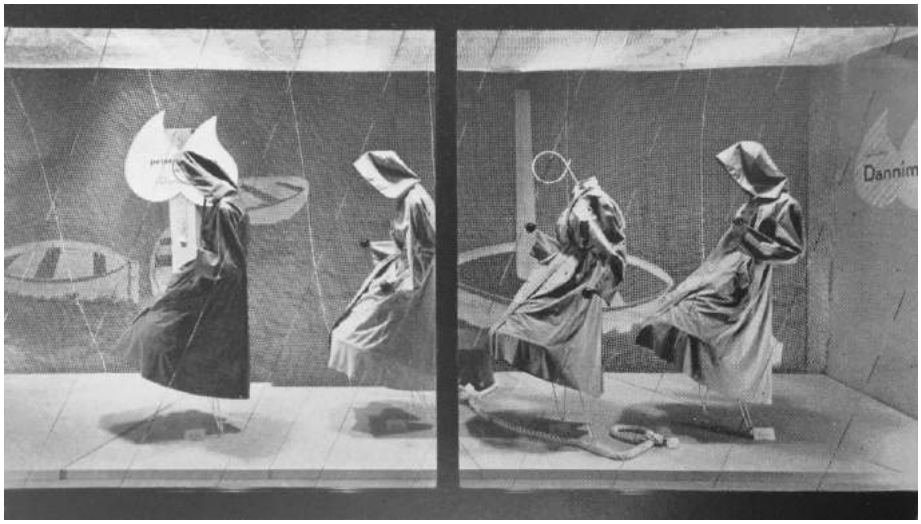

Figure 92:

Dannimac raincoat display at Peter Robinson. *Display*, May 1951, 19.

Observation found that although advertising knowledge in London was high, resulting from regular use of public transport, the buying of branded skirts was disproportionately low. Mass Observation attributed this to 'distribution difficulties', a potent reminder that London may have been gaining symbolic status as a fashion capital, but it was not necessarily easy to be a fashionable consumer in the city. 'Branded skirts', 1948. Mass Observation, FR 3070.

[23] In-store promotions for branded items such as Windsmoor skirts followed a similar pattern. *Display*, May 1951, 19.

[24] Peter Jones Sales Reviews, 1951-1952. John Lewis Archive, 2573/e.

[25] Chislett, *Marks in Time*, 26.

In spite of the fact that the increasing importance of branded ready-to-wear garments and London's changing demographics fundamentally changed how fashion was sold in the city's department stores, and as a result, how Londoners consumed, this period remains a significant gap in histories of fashion retail.[26] British retail histories that consider visual merchandising and promotion commonly focus on three distinct periods—the development of display in early department stores, the innovations in retail spectacle during the interwar years, and the well-documented fashion revolutions that changed the look of shopping in the 1960s.[27] By exploring the role of promotional and selling techniques in department stores, this chapter calls attention to the changing look of fashion retail in London during this overlooked immediate post-war period and reflects on its significance. It argues that the changes to display methodologies and aesthetics in this period should be considered in further detail in order to more fully understand how retailers navigated changes in the types of fashion goods available and new ways of selling fashion in the middle decades of the twentieth century. It also highlights the legacy and significance of austerity spectacle within the broader history of post-war fashion retail by exploring how the designers of window displays and departmental interiors were forced to innovate in response to post-war circumstances. Through this, it highlights the prominent role London retailers played as an international showcase for British fashion at a pivotal moment for the city and the nation's clothing industry.

More than window-dressing: display and spectacle in the West End

As the dust settled on Oxford Street and its surroundings after the war, retailers were left to assess the extent of the damage wrought by conflict to their businesses, from material harm to their physical holdings to the less easily quantifiable losses of expert staff and estranged customers. The intense combination of bomb damage, wartime shortages and government regulations in the West End resulted in a particularly changed shopping experience when compared with more suburban areas. Gone were the brightly lit display windows and spectacular promotional events, not suitable for an age of austerity; gone were the well- trained sales staff, to war and wartime jobs;

[26] Boydell, *Horrockses Fashions* 109.
[27] See, for example, Trentmann, *History of Consumption*; Breward, *The Hidden Consumer*; Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure*; Scott and Walker, 'Advertising, promotion, and interwar British department stores', 1105-1128; Ashmore, 'I think they're all mad', 58-79.

and gone were the previously luxurious dress departments, blighted by peeling paint and a shortage of goods. Finding ways to overcome the problems caused by post-war conditions was particularly pressing due to the need perceived by West End retailers to maintain the area's status as the nation's fashion centre. As fashion trade and travel reopened post-war, and the stores of the West End needed to once again compete with Fifth Avenue and the Champs-Élysées, as well as Liverpool and Edinburgh. But the combination of the West End's heritage as a centre for fashion retail and the level of damage inflicted on the area during the blitz also left it uniquely placed to lead the nation in reimagining modern retail, in particular through developing new techniques for the display and promotion of fashionable goods.

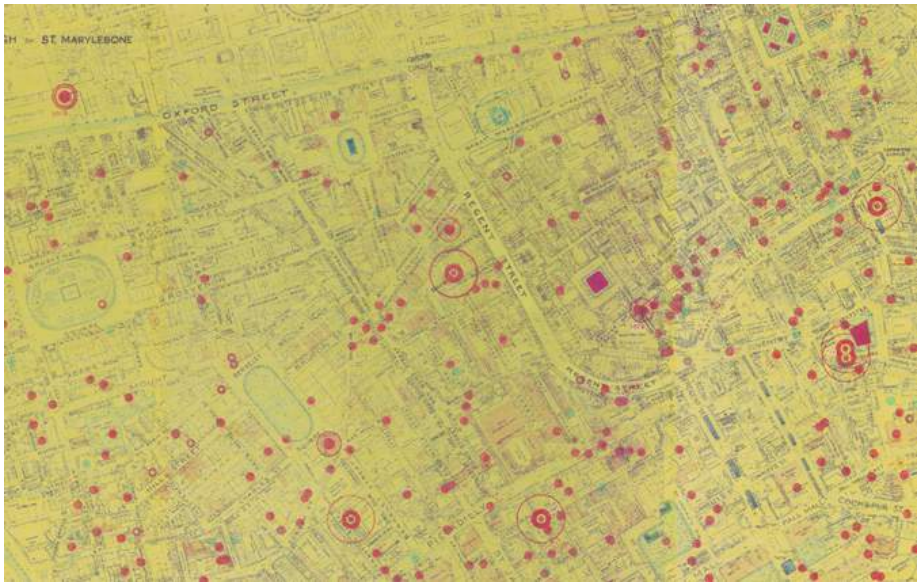

Figure 93:
Detail from Bomb Map Record of Incidents in the City of Westminster, 1945. *City of Westminster Archives*.

While broad swathes of the city were damaged during the blitz, the detailed bomb maps and ARP reports held in the City of Westminster Archives paint a particularly devastating picture of disrupted consumption across the West End.[28] From the department stores of Oxford Street to the areas around Bond Street that were

[28] Thanks to the Westminster City Archives' 'West End At War' project, which combines Westminster's bomb maps, photographic archives, ARP bomb reports and memories from contributing members of the public, it is possible to piece together a picture of how shopping on Oxford Street was changed by aerial bombardment. See Thomas, 'John Lewis, Oxford, Street', online.

traditionally associated with luxury consumption and bespoke clothing, the bombs that fell on the West End left an extensive trail of destruction.[29] Looking closely at these ARP reports also reveals a less conspicuous but still significant blitz legacy: the extent of the interior and cosmetic damage to West End shops. Although this damage is often forgotten, it was highly disruptive to consumption and the consumer experience. The same raid that razed John Lewis's West House also left Selfridges's lifts so damaged that they would not operate again until 1945, and shattered Selfridges's ground floor display windows to such an extent that these spaces were bricked-up due to lack of available replacement glass. A few hours later, the windows in Peter Robinson's Oxford Circus storefront were blown out and remained covered in hoardings until the end of the war.[30]

This destruction gave stores pause and forced them to consider how to reconstruct display and promotional sites in order to provide fashionable spectacle in a new, modern era. The rebuilding of very badly damaged stores would have to wait until the 1950s, but most were able to modernise retail spaces within their existing, albeit damaged, buildings. Reconstruction and redecorating was frustrated due to significant government restrictions, including quotas on the number of windows that shops could fit with new glass at any one time. Some, like Harrods, were not able to fully restore their windows until 1948.[31] These restrictions prevented retailers from simply reconstructing for business as usual—yet they also allowed shops the time to explore new ways of creating spectacle through display, visual merchandising, reorganising sales spaces and hosting small-scale events such as fashion shows.

Although London's post-war consumption is often described in terms of stasis—on-hold until the economic and social conditions of the city recovered from post-war austerity—behind the bomb-scarred facades of the West End, a number of stores were at the forefront of international developments in retail promotion in the late 1940s. The field of retail display was especially transformed during this period,

[29] On 17 April 1941, a parachute mine exploded in Jermyn Street, damaging luxury men's retailers Dunhill's; on 11 September 1940, high explosives hit the Burlington Arcade and damaged the windows of Austen Reed on Regent Street; and on 24 September 1940, Savile Row, the home of British tailoring, suffered a hit. ARP Message Form, Savile Row, 24 September 1940. Westminster City Archives.
[30] Westminster City Archives. ARP Message Form, Selfridges, 19 September 1940.
[31] *Display Design & Presentation*, July 1948, 12.

building on developments made during the war when the sense of national emergency 'inspired completely new methods and public enlightenment'.[32] Visual records suggest that many of the most innovative changes in visual merchandising were utilised in clothing displays for fashion departments, with a particular focus on how women's ready-to-wear garments were displayed.

This rapid advance of promotional theory and practices in fashionable display was likely related to the increasing importance of fashion revenues to department stores at a time when their profit margins were squeezed by austerity. Post-war clothing and haberdashery sales in department stores showed resilience in hard times, and rose year-on-year faster than any other category of goods between 1938 and 1950, making fashion promotions a priority for publicity strategies.[33] This section examines the significance of the evolution in promotional methods for fashion merchandise in the West End by looking at the changing exterior aesthetics of store window displays before moving inside to explore the design of fashion department interiors and the staging of promotional fashion shows.

Changing exteriors: the window display

Figure 94:

Shop assistants assist ARP staff to clear debris from damaged windows at Bourne & Hollingsworth's department store in London's West End after a German bombing raid. George W. Hales/Getty.

[32] *Display*, December 1947, 2.
[33] Plant and Fowler, 'Report on Department Store Trading 1950', 8.

The increasing importance of post-war window display to West End retailers

A photograph taken outside Oxford Street retailer Bourne & Hollingsworth the morning after a bombing raid in 1940 shows the serious disruption that could be caused to retail spaces by even relatively minor bomb damage (figure 94). The building looks relatively unscathed, but the gutter shines with broken glass interspersed with unidentifiable lengths of twisted metal—presumably remnants of the shop's frontage—and display props that have been propelled onto the street by the blast. As the figures in the photograph hurry to prepare these windows to be boarded up, an undressed display mannequin lays exposed and out of place on the pavement.[34] Although most store owners would have counted themselves lucky to escape with nothing worse than broken windows, this surreal image reminds us that aerial bombardment deprived West End consumers of one of twentieth century retail's great sensory pleasures: the visual spectacle of the shop window display. During the war, expanses of plate glass were often boarded up completely, or replaced by small peephole windows looking on to limited stock. This not only curtailed retailer's ability to promote merchandise to customers, but it also interrupted the association for many London consumers between the activity of shopping and the pleasure of looking at elaborate shop displays.[35]

The windows of the West End provided some of the first signs of post-war recovery in London retail. At a time when restrictions on paper usage seriously limited the use advertising methods such as promotional catalogues, posters and mail-outs, window displays offered West End stores vital marketing access to London's growing post-war population, and announced that London was once again open for business.[36] Reports by the Retail Distributors' Association on the 'Operating Costs of Department Stores' detail how the role of display grew nationally as a result of wartime shortages and post-war austerity conditions. As the 1949 report detailed, from 1938, store publicity expenditure on press advertising had fallen dramatically and direct mail advertising virtually disappeared.[37] Although department store publicity budgets (on average, as

[34] Bourne and Hollingsworth, 1940. George W. Hales/ Getty Images.
[35] Corrigan, *The Sociology of Consumption*, 64.
[36] Liberty & Co. did not produce its first post-war catalogue until 1952. City of Westminster Archives, Liberty & Co. catalogues.
[37] Plant and Fowler, 'Operating Costs of Department Stores Final Report 1949', 18.

a percentage of aggregate net sales) fell across both advertising and display spending, display budgets fell by less than half the amount of the advertising budgets, demonstrating a changing emphasis and that display played a relatively more important role in publicity strategies during this period.[38]

While this trend is reflected across various types of retailers, examining department store operating costs in more detail reveals that not all London stores invested equally in display. Figures from the 1930s reveal that prior to the war, high-medium class West End stores had invested considerably less in display than their medium-low class counterparts, relying instead on advertising.[39] However, in the immediate post-war period, smaller high-medium class West End stores (those with between £100,000 and £500,000 worth of gross trading sales, such as Liberty & Co.) increased their display spends considerably faster than both larger high-medium and medium-low class stores as a proportion of their overall publicity budgets. Most interestingly, these smaller high-medium retailers were the only group of stores to spend proportionally more on display personnel than on props, labels and building materials, indicating a serious investment in the creativity of display designers and mangers during a period of limited physical resources.[40]

This targeted evolution in publicity strategy was likely at least a partial response to the particular difficulties experienced by smaller high-medium class shops as a result of war and post-war conditions. West End department stores struggled with lower post-war sales growth than those in suburban London, likely as a result of reduced central London housing stock and the unpleasant physical nature of the bomb

[38] Between 1938 and 1949, department stores had reduced the amount they spent on general advertising (as a percentage of aggregate net sales) by 69.9 per cent., while the amount given to display had only been reduced by 34.5 per cent. compared to 1939. Plant and Fowler, 'Operating Costs of Department Stores Final Report' for 1938 and 1949.

[39] Between 1936 and 1938, high-medium West End stores were investing 0.19-0.21 per cent. of their aggregate net sales on display, whereas during the same period medium-low end stores spent 0.49-0.78 per cent. of aggregate net sales. Plant and Fowler, 'Operating Costs of Department Stores Final Report' for 1936, 1937 and 1938.

[40] Between 1950 and 1953, high-medium West End stores with less than £500,000 worth of gross trading sales were spending between 0.43-0.50 per cent. of their aggregate net sales on display personnel, and 0.39-0.47 per cent. on 'impersonal' display costs (presumably props). This is considerably more than larger high-medium stores, which spent between 0.13-0.15 per cent. on personnel and 0.17-0.25 per cent. on 'impersonal' costs. Plant and Fowler, 'Operating Costs of Department Stores Final Report' for 1950, 1951 and 1953.

damaged West End as compared to areas that had experienced less aerial bombing.[41] For example, between 1948 and 1949, high-medium class stores in central London saw a 1.3 per cent. fall in sales of women's coats, whereas suburban London stores saw a 14.3 per cent. increase, indicating that as clothing became more freely available after the end of rationing, many people were choosing to shop in suburban locations rather than travelling into central London. Additionally, it is probable that the fashion departments of high-medium class shops in particular were badly impacted due to their historic reliance on retail bespoke sales, which had fallen as a result of industry changes. [42] Unlike larger West End retailers with international reputations to help draw custom, smaller high-medium class shops (which often had somewhat old-fashioned reputations) needed to fight harder and more creatively to attract new customers in this increasingly competitive retail space, and the figures suggest they did so by investing in display.

New looks and American influences in West End window displays

The end of the Second World War not only coincided with observed increases in the significance of display in terms of overall store publicity expenditure, but also with a noticeable change in the aesthetics of West End window displays. As early as 1946, the trade magazine *Display* noted a staggering pace of change in visual merchandising on Oxford and Regent Streets, indicating that window displays were vital tools to the strategies employed by stores to lure shoppers back to the bomb-damaged West End.

To quantify what exactly *Display* means by 'change' in this context, it is necessary to consider post-war displays in a longer historical narrative. Eye catching shop window displays were familiar sights in London well before the war; indeed, it can be argued that the history of spectacular consumption in the city even predates the department store, stretching back to the window displays of the city's eighteenth century cloth merchants.[43] Window display culture undoubtedly developed with the advent of the department store, and there is clear evidence of display managers and window

[41] Plant and Fowler, 'Report on Department Store Trading' for 1949 and 1950.
[42] Liberty & Co. catalogues from 1920 to 1939 demonstrate the store's retail bespoke focus. City of Westminster Archives.
[43] Styles, *The Dress of the People*, 167.

dressers acting as tastemakers, responsible for the reputation of their stores, as early as the late nineteenth century.[44] The most common method of window display in the first half of the twentieth century was the 'dictionary' style, where a large number of goods were shown in a flat manner, intended to create spectacle by demonstrating the shop's extensive range of stock.[45] Although this method was still common in the lead up to the Second World War, window display methodologies showed signs of evolution by the 1930s.[46] Experiments in graphic design by figures such as Ashley Havinden advocated for the incorporation of elements of abstract art into commercial print advertising, and in 1937, the first commercial art school in Britain—the Reimann School of Art and Design—opened in Pimlico, having relocated from Berlin.[47] Notably, the Reimann School's window display department was staffed entirely without British teachers, but with employees from countries such as Germany who brought continental display aesthetics with them to London.[48] It was in this context that some London retailers, such as Jaeger and Simpson's of Piccadilly, noticeably turned towards creating pictorial window displays that relied on a greater sense of narrative, rather than simply the goods themselves, to generate passing interest.[49]

The war seems to have accelerated this trend in fashion display, most likely due to shortages of exciting goods to show off. By 1945, London's more experimental display designers were rarely displaying large numbers of fashion objects in one window, but commonly featuring one or two garments set in a narrative or surrealist scene, relying on symbolism to communicate with viewers. *Display* magazine provides a lens on this changing aspect of the retail landscape. Although *Display* continued to provide occasional editorial space for supporters of more traditional 'dictionary' styling—such as Sir Stafford Bourne of Bourne & Hollingsworth who believed this method was a more 'honest' way to sell to customers—revisiting issued from this period shows that the publication broadly advocated for display designers to embrace a more experimental and narrative turn.[50] The publication also indicates that, although many

[44] Marshall Orr, 'Designing 'A Show-Place for Visitors', 9-14.
[45] Lomax, 'The View from the Shop', 281-2.
[46] Ibid., 267.
[47] Simpson, 'Architecture and Interiors', 57-77; Suga, *The Reimann School*, 10.
[48] Ibid., 34.
[49] The move towards more narrative displays can be traced in innovations in display mannequins, notably the 'sporting mannequins', staged in active poses, that J. Gottwald Ltd. began to produce in the mid-1930s. Artmonsky, *Showing Off*, 48. See also Bronwen Edwards's account of display design at Simpson's of Piccadilly in Edwards, 'Making the West End modern', 12.
[50] 'Letter from Stafford Bourne'. *Display*, April 1947, 22.

of the theoretical underpinnings of these evolving trends were provided by international retail developments—particularly in the form of new consumer research stemming from America—austerity regulations and limitations on materials dictated by the wartime and post-war British governments were significant factors in shaping the direction of post-war display in London.

In spite of the specific local difficulties faced by West End retailers as a result of austerity, their display personnel remained outward looking in their research. The particular importance of American ideas can be seen in the considerable investment many shops made in sending their display managers on lengthy research visits to the United States typified by the trip made by H. A. Holmes of Selfridges in December 1946.[51] Stores without the resources to send staff on fact-finding trips abroad could follow international developments in visual merchandising on the pages of *Display,* which regularly devoted column inches to new American research and lavish images of Fifth Avenue shop windows. The extent of post-war American influence is especially surprising as London retailers had strongly resisted American influences in the inter-war years.[52]

West End display managers were particularly interested in cutting-edge American research into consumer behavior, which used qualitative methods such as traffic counts to investigate how displays could best encourage consumers to make a purchase.[53] This research highlighted the potential value in effective display over other publicity methods through statistics that impressed its influence on consumers, for example by reporting that 'at least 25 per cent. of the people who enter a shop do so directly to the attraction of the window display'.[54] Central to emerging methodologies was the idea that visual merchandising allowed retailers to tap into and shape shoppers conceptions about aspiration and identity, suggesting that, when retailers put a garment in a window, they sold both that garment and 'an exciting new way of living'.[55] Although department stores had been using their window displays as a tool to infuse everyday goods with associations of exclusivity and prestige since the

[51] *Display Design & Presentation*, December 1946, 36.
[52] Lomax, 'The View from the Shop', 291.
[53] Erwin, 'Display: Extra attention means extra sales', 114-120.
[54] *Display*, February 1946, 10.
[55] *Display Design & Presentation*, October 1948, 12.

nineteenth century, this new research concluded that, in a marketplace increasingly dominated by standardised, branded fashion goods, displays needed to infuse the retail space itself with symbolic value.[56]

The idea that displays should sell aspiration and fantasy over and above the specific products they contained was especially enticing to post-war retailers that had to balance fashionable aspiration against stock shortages and the new economic realities faced by their customers. Although there is a lack of contemporary consumer research to indicate how shoppers reacted to aspirational displays at a time of such shortages, a report from Mass Observation on window-shopping at Selfridges in 1946 found that shoppers were 63 per cent. more likely to stop and look at a display of expensive fur coats—even if they could not afford to purchase them—than they were to stop for a display of 'everyday coats'.[57] There is also anecdotal evidence that consumer interest was piqued by displays that demonstrated an almost frivolous pace of change. For example, in December 1946 Fenwick devoted an entire window to a single fur coat, half-draped through a gilt frame. This display attracted considerable attention because the coat was changed daily, providing an arresting source of variety for shoppers more familiar with the idea that a fur coat should provide decades of use, and confirming that spectacle could be just as attractive to shoppers as the material goods in the window.[58]

Responding to this emerging consumer research, retailers began to produce window displays containing items that were often very different from the merchandise they encouraged people to buy. For example, display designers for Peter Jones's highly successful fashion windows in spring 1949 ensured that every display series included 'at least one 'model' window devoted to high fashion goods'.[59] This move did not indicate that Peter Jones expected its shoppers to buy the luxury items from these 'model' windows in bulk, but by emphasising the shop's status as a retailer of important fashions, they succeeded in raising sales in the shop's low-cost dress department.[60] This type of aspirational selling was especially important for

[56] Parker, 'Sign Consumption in the 19th-Century Department Store', 353-354.
[57] 'Window shopping (Oxford Street)', 1946. Mass Observation, TC 4-5-D.
[58] There are several examples of similar stunts during this period, with some displays being changed as frequently as twice a day. *Display*, January 1947, 33.
[59] *Display Design & Presentation*, February 1949, 38.
[60] Peter Jones Department Reviews 1950-1952. John Lewis Archive, 2573/e.

department stores competing with multiple retailers, who had proved much more successful at selling new trends during the peak fashion sales months that followed the spring and autumn couture shows.[61]

The use of window displays to sell a store's exclusivity and fashionable prestige could even bypass departmental stock entirely, as was the case when Marshall & Snelgrove devoted all eight windows of their Oxford Street frontage to showing the original costumes from the film *An Ideal Husband*, famously designed by Cecil Beaton.[62] In some cases, where the retailer was suffering a particularly acute stock shortage, lavish window displays were created without any garments at all. When the couturier Strassner of Audley Street could not spare enough fabric to create a new display garment they instead showed a 'wheelbarrow filled with a magnificent bouquet of late-flowering blossoms: no dresses' at all.[63]

American proponents of new visual merchandising techniques were firm in their conclusion that successful display required store managers and display personnel to work more closely together, recognising that display needed to be better integrated into the business strategies of the entire company in order to be as effective as possible.[64] It is likely that West End stores were familiar with this idea, which may go some way to explaining the creation of new display manager roles—responsible for overseeing the entirety of a store's display—during this period. Two stores to do this were Simpson's of Piccadilly, who appointed Natasha Kroll, and Liberty & Co., who hired Eric Lucking. The work of Kroll and Lucking demonstrates how such smaller high-medium end stores effectively developed their display methodologies in response to austerity conditions, highlighting that the transformation of post-war display windows was not achieved in spite of austerity, but as a result of it, with shortages and limitations acting as catalysts for change.

[61] Sales figures from 1950 to 1951 show that multiple retailers saw considerably heightened fashion sales during the April-May and November-December periods as compared to department stores Plant and Fowler, 'Report on department store trading 1951', 5.
[62] *Display Design & Presentation*, December 1947, 25.
[63] *Display*, January 1947, 33.
[64] Cowee, 'Display—or visual merchandising?', 48-52.

Experimenting with new ideas under austerity shortages

In spite of the conceptual influence of American consumer research and retail methodology during this period, implementation in London store windows produced displays that remained visually distinct from their transatlantic counterparts in New York and Chicago. Shortages of display props and the prevailing culture of austerity, which viewed the excesses of American consumer culture with moral suspicion (indeed, Kroll believed that the volume of new merchandise and display props that New York stores had access to led to a 'lack of restraint'), necessitated careful consideration of how American research could be used to best effect in London.[65] Rather than adopting American aesthetics, stores such as Liberty & Co. and Simpson's reinterpreted consumer research and modified the material excess of some American windows, resulting in a unique display culture for which the West End would become well known in the trade press.

Both Kroll and Lucking had backgrounds as display designers before they became display managers, and their creative approaches were rooted in a practical understanding of how to sell merchandise. Kroll had trained in display design at the Reimann Schule in Berlin. She later became a member of staff when the school moved to London in 1936, before working at Rowntree's Department stores as a display designer.[66] Kroll joined Simpson's in 1942, when the war allowed her to break through the traditionally male hierarchies of display, and over the next 12 years was promoted to oversee the store's entire publicity and design function. The Reimann School was also important in the career of Eric Lucking; Arthur Stewart Liberty appointed Lucking in 1945, after attending a course at the establishment that persuaded him of the importance in investing in display as a publicity method.[67] Lucking was recently demobbed, but prior to the war he had worked as a display designer at a number of London stores, including Army and Navy, D. H. Evans, and Druce's. Lucking was Liberty & Co.'s first ever display manager, and he was able to exert a high level of influence as his appointment to the role centralised display design, allowing Lucking to oversee

[65] Artmonsky, *Showing Off*, 134.
[66] Ibid., 134.
[67] Eric Lucking personal papers. Archive of Art and Design, AAD/1986/8.

unified displays with coherent themes and connections and ending the practice of individual departments dressing their own windows,.[68]

Government regulations placed limitations on what Kroll and Lucking were able to create by restricting the use of lighting and certain materials. Display designers especially struggled with a serious shortage in display mannequins and props, and official restrictions imposed limits on the use of raw materials such as paper and wood. In order to achieve visually striking displays in spite of these limitations, display designers needed to be extremely resourceful. Both Kroll and Lucking believed that display creativity flourished as a result of these shortages. Lucking explicitly explained that austerity conditions offered the opportunity for designers to break with the traditions of pre-war window display designs, which he described as 'too much gilding of the lily'.[69] Indeed, issues of *Display* from late 1945 and early 1946 are dominated by distinctly 'make do and mend' ideas, such as using dyed sawdust and autumn leaves to cover damaged floors, creating backdrops of coloured water in glass tumblers, and updating old pre-war display mannequins with plaster of paris 'facials' and improvised paper wigs. [70] In line with this perspective, Lucking constructed backdrops from leftover blackout fabric, and Kroll is cited in *Display* for her experimental use of found objects, such as appropriating leaves and pebbles to use as price labels.[71]

A lack of display props and shortages of stock contributed to the widespread use of minimalist displays, often with single objects arranged on stark white columns or accompanied by coloured geometric shapes. These displays were more than just economical—they challenged the traditional aesthetic of many London shops, promoting a more modern and uncluttered approach to selling. Symbolism became important as a result of limited resources, and designers learned to make a feature of empty space, suspending items using invisible Nylon wires against plain backdrops to create an uncanny visual trick and allowing sparse props such as individual branches to stand in for the dense trees of a forest. In turn, this increasing familiarity with symbolism in props created an environment where the garments on display could

[68] Artmonsky, *Showing Off*, 136-139. See also letters between Eric Lucking and Arthur Stewart Liberty, discussing display and publicity design. Archive of Art and Design, AAD/1986/8.
[69] Artmonsky, *Showing Off*, 137.
[70] *Display Design & Presentation*, March 1946, 6-9.
[71] Artmonsky, *Showing Off*, 137; Symes, *Display Illustrated*, 131.

also be loaded with symbolic meaning, requiring passersby to engage actively with the shop from the pavement. For example, customers learned to understand that, in lieu of an illustrative backdrop or an abundance of props, the incorporation of a single suitcase into a display of men's suits in a Simpson's window during Kroll's term at the retailer signified the exoticism of overseas travel.[72]

What is striking about these early post-war displays in the West End is not simply the ingenuity in sourcing found objects for props, but the ambitious and artistic ways in which they were put to use to convey meaning and fantasy tableaus to viewers. These efforts sought to balance consumer aspirations with austerity realities in order to reconstruct the idea of shopping as a leisure activity, something that had been disrupted by clothes rationing. Although the link between desire and consumption was by no means entirely suppressed by concerns of need and practicality during the period of clothes rationing, the emotional reward of shopping for fashions was certainly muddied by increased concern and purchasing guilt for many consumers.[73] West End display managers recognised that if window displays were 'used less for selling than for prestige', they could provide a crucial tool in the battle to reestablish fashionable consumption as an enjoyable activity.[74]

Display designers looked to the art world for inspiration. Lucking, for example, employed artists to emphasise Liberty's exclusivity through a modern display aesthetic. In 1949, he commissioned coloured mobiles from Lyn Chadwick to hang in Liberty's fashion windows, elevating the status of the accompanying dressed mannequin to a work of sculpture by association (figure 95).[75] But Lucking also considered his own displays as forms of art and, like Kroll, drew particularly from surrealist art to find aesthetics for austerity displays. Surrealism was well-established in Britain following the success of the 1936 London International Surrealist Exhibition and the influence of surrealism on the work of well-known war artists such as Henry Moore and Paul Nash, not to mention in the fashion photography of Lee Miller. However, it is only in the post-war period that the influence of surrealist art can be directly traced in shop window display. The surprising juxtaposition of seemingly

[72] Display, *World Window*, 115.
[73] Kirkham, 'Keeping up home front morale', 205-227.
[74] *Display*, November 1949, 22.
[75] *Display*, October 1949, 30.

incongruous objects in display windows by both Kroll and Lucking shows that they embraced the surrealist belief that emotional power was contained in the bringing together of supposedly disparate realities, an act which revealed the false nature of those realities in order to attain a new level of social freedom.[76] Display designers like Kroll and Lucking used this power to draw attention from passers-by, encouraging them to stop and engage imaginatively with their window displays.

Figure 95:
Eric Lucking window display for Liberty & Co., featuring a Lyn Chadwick mobile. 1949. *Display, Design and Presentation*, October 1949, 30.

In this way, the aesthetics of surrealism neatly combined the concepts of modern marketing and the restrictions of austerity, allowing designers to work creatively within the confines of limited props and goods. These factors perhaps most acutely aligned in relation to the serious shortage of display mannequins. Retailers struggled as British mannequin manufacturing was virtually nonexistent during the immediate post-war years and old pre-war models were either damaged or seriously out of date in their 1930s shape and styling.[77] Then, when the first post-war display mannequin imports finally arrived in the U.K. in 1948, they were subject to prohibitively high rates of purchase tax.[78]

[76] Breton, *Manifestos of Surrealism*, 20.
[77] The numerous adverts for mannequin refurbishment services in trade magazines demonstrate the severity of this problem. *Display*, June 1946, 12.
[78] *Display Design & Presentation*, March 1950, 9.

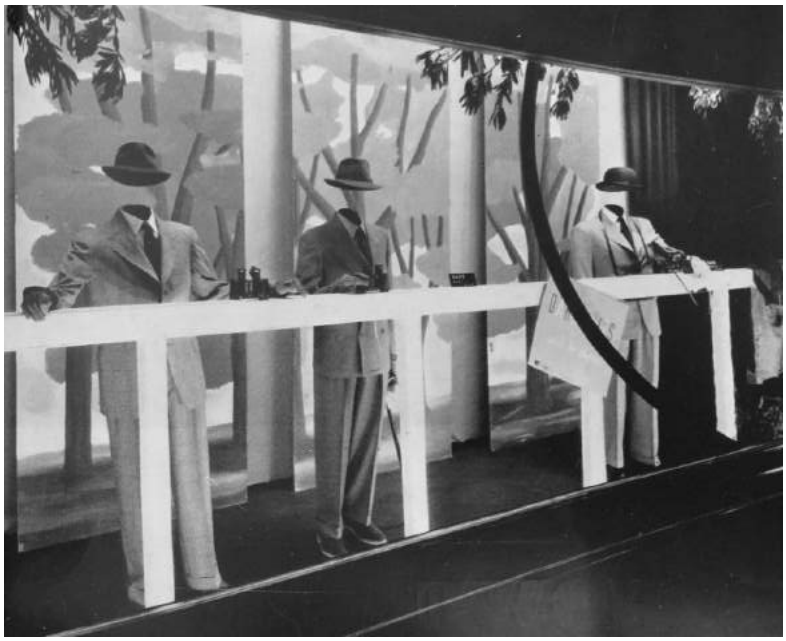

Figure 96:
Natasha Kroll window display for Simpson's of Piccadilly. *Display*, May 1950, cover page.

Turning limitations into creative opportunity, both Kroll and Lucking countered this problem by disassembling old display mannequins and artfully salvaging limbs, hands and other useful pieces to create surreal displays that explored the physicality of fashionable aspiration and the dressed body. In Liberty's most eye-catching window displays from the era, disembodied hands hold up gloves or bags, and sometimes the body is dispensed with entirely and dresses are draped or hung as if floating out of wardrobes of their own volition.[79] Lucking frequently removed damaged mannequin heads and replaced them with bunches of flowers and seaweed, or fitted old heads to wire bodies.[80] At Simpson's, Kroll reversed this latter technique and suspended hats above empty necks, as if perched on invisible heads (figure 96).[81] These techniques created surreal encounters between the garment and viewer, where the mannequins were brought to life by the viewer's imagination, which fills the empty space where the heads should be with their own invented faces and conversations.

[79] Eric Lucking papers. Archive of Art and Design, AAD/1986/8.
[80] *Display Design & Presentation*, May 1947, 22; photograph of satin and Rayon fabric display, 1946. City of Westminster Archive, 788.
[81] Display, *World Window*, 115.

Kroll's faceless mannequins were given personalities by the viewer, predating calls in the 1950s and 60s for display designers to create display mannequins that reflected individuals rather than averages.[82]

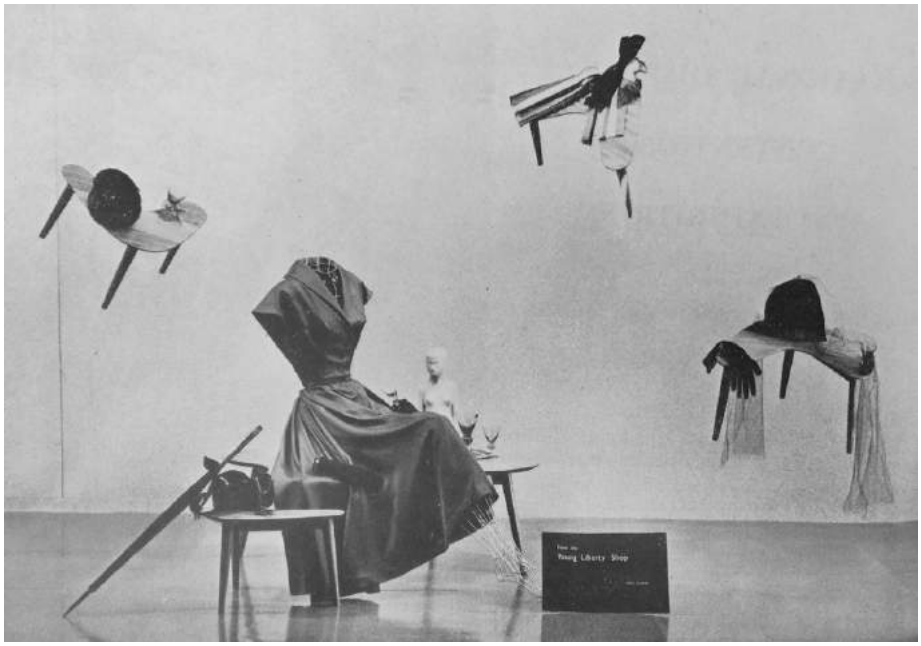

Figure 97:

Eric Lucking window display for the 'Young Liberty Shop', 1951. *Display, Design and Presentation*, November 1951, 18.

Lucking also used handmade wire mannequins, which could be constructed to perform active poses that were impossible for the stiff commercial shop mannequins of the time.[83] He frequently used headless wire mannequins in displays for the 'Young Liberty Shop', the store's pioneering teenage department, and figure 97 demonstrates the bodily power of these transparent figures. The window display features a single dress, a method that would have been viewed by many display stylists as an enormous waste of prime Regent Street sales space.[84] However, the purpose of the display is not to sell the dress itself, but to promote the concept of Liberty's as a fashionable destination. The wire structure is barely there, and the

[82] Mannequin designer Adele Rootstein spoke publicly on the importance of the personality of mannequins. Wheeler, *Display by Design*, 147.
[83] Wire mannequins were popular for their versatility and low cost, but although they became a staple of London shop windows, their origins can actually be found in Parisian couture and the wire mannequins made to model the miniature creations that toured various European and American cities (including London) as the *Théâtre de la Mode* exhibition in 1945. Charles-Roux, *Theatre de la Mode*, 18.
[84] 'Letter from Stafford Bourne', *Display*, April 1947, 22.

missing head and arms place emphasis on the exquisite wire foot, highlighting the alluring nature of the dress as it drapes over the leg, while a series of props float around the model as if in orbit to the power of Regent Street's fashionable bodies. By making this figure the sole focus of the consumer's attention, the display promised them a fashionable identity that would draw passing admiration. The display implies that the store could not only equip the shopper with a single fashionable dress, but through this it would transform them into a fashionable individual.

These surrealist, disembodied displays by Kroll and Lucking invited each consumer to engage with the featured garments by imagining the type of body that would wear it, and perhaps in turn aspire to be the body inside the garment. By demanding this level of engagement from viewers, these designers forged a new relationship between the consumer and window displays. In this way, the austerity shortages that prompted Kroll and Lucking to turn to surrealist influences also freed the designers from the burden of representation, giving them more license to create unusual and surprising displays tailored to different types of merchandise.

The legacy of austerity display

The rapid developments seen in 1940s display aesthetics demonstrate the necessity for fashion retailers to compete for custom at the highest level, arguing against the common portrayal of shops enjoying a seller's market during the late 1940s. The use of high end products (out of the reach of the majority of customers) and success of film tie-ins indicate a consumer hungry for inspiration over practicality, with women in particular considered to be 'buying dresses 'today' for 'today and tomorrow''.[85] In fact, the window displays of London offer a vision of the hopeful side of the national mood at a time of austerity, something reflected in news reports showing Oxford Street window displays drawing large crowds.[86]

The importance of display in department store publicity strategies diminished with the end of austerity conditions almost as quickly as it had soared between the end of the war and 1949. As the 1950s progressed, stores once again begin to focus their

[85] *Display*, March 1945, 411.
[86] *Display*, March 1946, 47.

spending on print advertising, confirming that the 1940s were a unique period for the importance of display.[87] Similarly, the pioneering aesthetics of the late 1940s did not last. The trend for abstraction, where designers learned to make a feature of empty space, faded towards the end of the decade as the availability of display props increased. It was replaced in the early 1950s with a much more plentiful visual fantasy—where instead of a background of floating shapes or symbolic objects, garments were cast in a familiar (if glamorous) setting, such as a palace ballroom, dressed with copious props and often staged as a well-known fairytale narrative.[88] In doing so, London's window displays became more visually spectacular, compared to the understated surrealist aesthetic of the 1940s, but lost much of the unique visual culture they had cultivated during that time, and began to more closely resemble those seen in comparable stores in New York and Geneva.[89]

However, the display managers of the 1940s left an important legacy to West End fashion retail. Although their work has been largely forgotten today, business archives and *Display* magazine indicate that display managers such as Natasha Kroll and Eric Lucking were successful at creating a large amount of publicity for their stores (relative to their size) through innovative display. Further to this, they pioneered a more joined-up approach to department store publicity, where display, departmental decor and print materials were brought together to create greater visual coherence and so foster customer loyalty and brand recognition.[90] As a result, display would continue to hold a place of significant strategic importance in integrated publicity strategies in subsequent decades. Furthermore, the skills honed by both Natasha Kroll and Eric Lucking were utilised in other cultural exports. Natasha Kroll went on to be a designer for the BBC while Eric Lucking worked in exhibition design on projects ranging from the Festival of Britain to international trade fairs which promoted British goods for export through groups such as the Nylon Spinners Association.[91]

[87] Plant and Fowler, 'Operating cost of department stores', reports for 1935 to 1938 and 1949 to 1953. (Note: Plant and Fowler's 'Operating cost of department stores' reports were not produced between 1938 and 1949.)
[88] 'Dickens and Jones', *Display*, January 1950, 21.
[89] *Display*, August 1951, 32-33.
[90] Cant and Hefer, 'Visual Merchandising Displays', 1489–1496.
[91] Eric Lucking correspondence regarding Festival of Britain and Nylon Spinners Association. Archive of Art and Design, AAD/1986/8.

Indeed, while the experimental aesthetics of austerity were a fleeting presence in West End visual merchandising, they did not vanish entirely. Their influence can be traced through the aesthetics of West End fashion retail over the subsequent decades. From the look of Carnaby Street boutiques in the 1960s to the revival of Lucking-inspired disembodied figures in Selfridges's 2011 'Bright Young Things' window displays, which featured headless mannequins with chair legs for limbs, the shockingly modern visual merchandising of post-war fashion retail has been repeated and recycled. In keeping with the particular relationship between heritage and modernity that has long characterised West End fashion retail, in their recycling they have become part of the area's aesthetic culture.

Changing interiors: self-service, fashion shows and the arrival of the Junior Miss

Stepping from the pavement into West End department stores, customers were greeted with equally radical changes to the aesthetics of women's fashion departments. These occurred primarily as a result of the growing reliance of these stores on sales of ready-to-wear clothes made according to standardised sizing, which led to a move towards self-service in fashion departments.

Standardised sizing allowed customers more autonomy whilst shopping, which had broader repercussions for how clothes were selected and how retail spaces were staffed. Customers familiar with the numbered system no longer required a sales assistant to help them navigate the various sizes and shapes of different fashion brands, but were instead able to pick a garment off the rack themselves, safe in the knowledge that it should correspond to their body. As a result, the widespread adoption of standardised sizing by British manufacturers is strongly connected to the uptake of 'self-selection' (or self-service) in fashion retail in the late 1940s. This shift also enabled customers to select their own garments from the full variety available on open display, rather than relying on a salesperson's judgment and knowledge of back-room stock. The move towards self-service was further accelerated during this period by a shortage of skilled sales staff, particularly in London, whose population had decreased during the war.[92]

[92] Notes on introduction of self-service in fashion departments in the autumn of 1951. Peter Jones Weekly Notes, 27.11.51. John Lewis Archives, 946/7.

The significant rise of self-service meant retailers were no longer able to rely on the influence exerted by salespeople on the shop floor to persuade customers to make a purchase. Instead, stores had to explore new, subtler ways of influencing consumer choice. The move to self-service in West End fashion departments increased the importance of the retail environment itself as a form of packaging.[93] Retailers turned to décor and display to sell clothes, demanding customers employed a greater level of sophistication in the way they interpreted visual cues in the store. Some West End shops, such as Liberty & Co. and Simpson's, expanded the role of their display managers to include oversight of the aesthetics of department decors as well as window displays, seeking a previously unseen level of brand coherence in fashion displays and décor.[94]

Self-service changed the process of buying clothes. Store display and décor became increasingly coordinated and also took on an educational role as consumers adapted to this new system. Visual merchandising was vital for the cultivation of a fashionably confident and informed consumer, capable of making their own selection from a range of garments. The educational role of a coherent display and departmental décor strategy is evidenced by D. H. Evans' successful 'Fashion Wise' promotional campaign, launched in the spring of 1949. The campaign's uncluttered posters featured images of just one or two outfits, reflecting the latest styles, and the simplicity of these posters enabled them to be used in both print advertising and in-store visual merchandising (figure 98). They provided the inspiration and styling for a series of shop window displays, in which the 'Fashion Wise' campaign imagery formed the backdrop for simple mannequins dressed in items similar to the ones featured in the campaign.[95] Within the store itself, the posters were adapted to become showcase treatments on boards around the fashion department, guiding customers towards specific items of stock and giving them clear ideas of how to put individual items together to form a fashionable outfit. This level of visual direction was an important tool in assisting consumers to make the transition to self-service clothes

[93] This approach was not unique to fashion. The revolutionary effect of self-service on the grocery industry has been studied across Europe and North America, with retail historians arguing that the uptake of self-service increasingly related the cultural value of goods to their packaging. Sandgren, 'From 'Peculiar Stores' to 'a New Way of Thinking', 734-753; Jessen and Langer, *Transformations of retailing*, 5.

[94] Eric Lucking was promoted to the role of Display manager in 1947. Eric Lucking personal papers. Archive of Art and Design, AAD/1986/8.

[95] *Display Design & Presentation*, March 1949, 26.

shopping, helping individuals navigate through a confusing range of new season stock without relying on a member of sales staff.

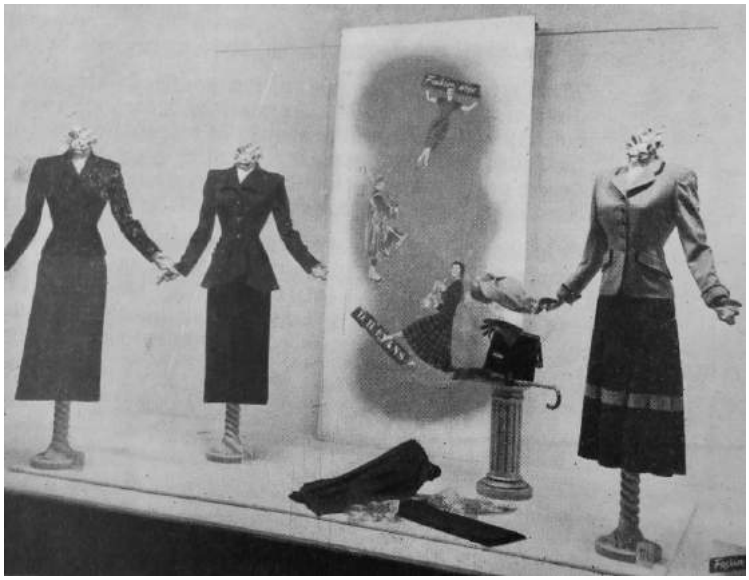

Figure 98:
D.H. Evans 'Fashion Wise' in-store display. *Display*, March 1949, 26.

As the move towards self-service in shops increased, innovative visual merchandising was even able to provide a solution to research that suggested customers still desired the idea of human interaction in a retail environment, but increasingly without actually having to interact themselves.[96] In 1949, the newly refurbished Regent Street exterior of Richard Shops unveiled a long glass gallery that customers walked through to enter the shop (figure 99). This space featured a recreation of the interior of the fashion department with display mannequins—arranged as if gossiping over the latest fashion trends—in place of customers, presenting the shopper with an idealised, but still accessible, image of themselves as a fashionable consumer.[97] As a mid-market store, Richard Shops was also able to reinforce their fashionable reputation through this presentation, proclaiming that fashion was about attitude and the enjoyment of consumption rather than solely access to unobtainable high-value goods.

[96] Bowlby, *Carried Away*, 47.
[97] *Display Design & Presentation*, July 1949, 15.

Providing easy accessibility was key to this method of using spectacle to sell fashion goods in self-service departments. Gone were the days of the large-scale extravagant events seen in the interwar period, in part due to financial constraints but more importantly because such visuals no longer suited the changed ways that customers interacted with staff and selected goods to purchase. In their place a new, quieter and more accessible type of performance emerged that used staff wearing items of stock to visually promote new fashions. This subtler spectacle was also embedded in the design and layout of departments, giving consumers a greater sense of belonging and ownership over these fashionable spaces, and the trends they found within them, than ever before.

Figure 99:

Window display at Richard Shops. *Display, Design and Presentation*, July 1949, 14.

Creating the Junior Miss department

Self-service democratised the experience of selecting new fashions and constructing outfits for many consumers, but it proved particularly revolutionary in selling to young women who fell into the emerging teenage demographic. This new female teenage target market was considered to be a particularly rich consumer base for testing emerging methodologies due to its increasing spending power and willingness to try new things. Although the British teenager is often understood as a uniquely post-war phenomenon—and in particular as a product of 1950s affluence—there is strong evidence of a consumer identity amongst teenage women in the immediate

post-war period.[98] In this context, the novel marketing techniques introduced by post-war retailers to target this demographic warrant closer scrutiny.

Figure 100:
Harper's Bazaar, May 1945, 4.

The rise of ready-to-wear fashions is intimately linked to teenage consumption, replacing homemade garments (often produced by mothers) with shop-bought aspiration. As the practice of shopping with friends grew in prominence as an acceptable leisure activity, ready-to-wear clothes allowed young people to have their sartorial choices peer-reviewed.[99] As such, it is perhaps little surprise that, although youth styles had already started to appear in British stores in the inter-war years, the

[98] Hennessey, *Having it so good*, 491-2; Fowler, *Youth Culture in Modern Britain*, 115.
[99] Schrum, 'Oh the Bliss', 136.

distinct and strategic marketing of teenage styles exploded post-war in tandem with the nation's increasingly efficient ready-to-wear industry.[100] West End retailers actively pioneered youth fashions through targeted promotions developed in response to research widely reported in the trade press that suggested publicity had a particularly strong effect on teenagers, who showed preference for the most widely advertised goods.[101] The teen (or youth) market played an emerging role in the promotional activities of London retailers from as early as 1945, although with varying degrees of success—as Harrods's adverts promoting grey flannel gym-slip style dresses demonstrate, these early attempts often fell flat with their intended audience because their tone failed to capture the cultural shift of young women demanding fashions and attitudes that moved them beyond the store's existing children's department (figure 100). The more successful promotions of teenage fashions were those that provided excitement at a time of austerity. These attracted considerable media attention, not least because—unlike the Parisian fashions that dominated many press reports—teenage fashions offered a form of fashionable aspiration that was more accessible because they were actually available to buy in West End shops.[102]

Liberty & Co. were innovators in the aesthetics of teenage fashion. The Young Liberty department, which opened in 1949, provided a strong visual reminder of the modernity of youth fashions, both in and out of the store. Young Liberty was granted its own dedicated display window through which display manager Eric Lucking could project ideas of teenage fashion. While the store's other windows (particularly those selling dressmaking fabrics) focused on the static beauty of the tableau presented to the street, the Young Liberty window was concerned with conveying attitudes. For example, in a special Valentine's Day window in 1950, a single mannequin was placed in the window surrounded by broken plaster hearts and seated next to a wastepaper basket filled with ripped love letters from unwanted boyfriends (figure 101).[103] The prominent position of the discarded letters indicates that the display aimed to strike passers-by with an impression of the mannequin's independent personality, even over and above the enticing but accessible ready-to-wear garments that dressed her, proclaiming that the confident teenager was not afraid to be a well-dressed

[100] Ewing, *History of 20th Century Fashion*, 152-153.
[101] *Display*, September 1947, 35.
[102] *The Tatler and Bystander*, 16 January 1946, 90.
[103] *Display*, March 1950, 23.

heartbreaker. The ideal young woman, as presented in these windows, was not inaccessibly expensively dressed, but an achievable aspiration—she was as much about attitude as access to the 'right' clothes.

Figure 101:
Young Liberty Valentine's Day window, February 1950. *Display*, March 1950, 23.

Similarly, D. H. Evans adapted their promotional aesthetics during this period to target a younger demographic. Recognising that the practice of photographing stiffly posed models was associated with catalogues containing clothes a teenage girl would see her mother wearing, D.H. Evans demanded more theatrical performances from the models engaged on their youthful photo shoots. In 1946, the D. H. Evans 'Summer Snapshots' catalogue invited customers to peruse its pages with a promise of spontaneity and fun. Emulating the look of a photograph album, it created a compelling narrative by explaining how 'We waited for the sun, then we took our colour camera, our mannequins and our precious new frocks into the green of the countryside', and by showing the brightly coloured dresses on active models, laughing together, waving and pointing at mysterious objects just out of shot (figure 102). These models are presented as a young woman's peers, rather than her betters, and the catalogue is careful to remind the customer that she too can buy into this

atmosphere by visiting the fashion department: 'We hope you'll enter into the spirit of our escapade as much as you'll enjoy buying and wearing our frocks!'[104]

Figure 102:
D. H. Evans 'Summer Snapshots' catalogue. House of Fraser Archive, FRAS 375/7.

D. H. Evans continued this practice in their 'Fashion Wise' campaign, in which images of models in active poses were cut-out and placed on blank backgrounds (figure 103). This gave a dynamic quality to the promotion as it freed the models from any specific location. Some even appeared as if flying, suspended from strings of balloons.[105] The fashions in these images are liberated from the reality of austerity London as a physical place, giving the young consumer space to fantasise about the excitement offered by a future that promised to be brighter and easier than her current reality. However, even while the adverts have no background scenery, they remain rooted to their Oxford Street location; both the use of familiar London stock figures (such as

[104] D. H. Evans 'Summer Snapshots' catalogue. House of Fraser Archive, FRAS 375/7.
[105] 'Fashion Wise' campaign image. House of Fraser Archive, FRAS 384/1.

police men) and the naming of the Oxford Street location created a valuable association between the West End and youth fashions for the retailer, and reminded the consumer that, despite imagery indulging imagined escape, this was the location where their fashionable ideals could be attained.

Figure 103:
D. H. Evans 'Fashion Wise' campaign image. House of Fraser Archive, FRAS 384/1.

But the biggest change made by West End retailers in catering for the teenage market was not found in display and advertising activities, but in the development of specialist youth fashion departments where the visual merchandising of fashion goods could be targeted specifically at this demographic. The idea of a physically separate department for teenage fashion, distinct from the womenswear and children's departments, first emerged in 1926 at the Hutzler Brothers department store in Baltimore, U.S.A., but did not transition to British department stores until the 1940s.[106] Most frequently called the 'Junior Miss' department (although its title varied from store to store), this new department provided a space where the fashionable imaginations of young consumers could be set free, unhampered by associations with

[106] Schrum, 'Oh the Bliss', 142.

the clothes of the children's department, selected for you by your mother, or the womenswear department where your mother shopped for herself.[107]

Some of the first Junior Miss departments were found in West End department stores, including Liberty & Co., D.H. Evans and Peter Robinson. As a newly created space, the Junior Miss department also functioned as a crucial testing ground for implementing modern interior design ideas in a retail environment, minimising the risk of upsetting existing customers with unwelcome changes. For example, Swan and Edgar experimented with large floating islands, positioned to lead the customer on a route through a serious of neatly styled mannequins (Figure 104). At D. H. Evans, the layout of the Junior Miss department was conspicuously less formal than the store's womenswear department, and haphazardly arranged clothes racks were interspersed with tables and chairs to encourage visitors to linger.[108] This aesthetic was based on the prevailing theory, in line with the independent attitude that Lucking appealed to at Liberty & Co., that teenagers wished to experience the retail environment as a space in which they felt comfortable and in control.

Figure 104:

Junior Miss department at Swan and Edgar. *Display, Design and Presentation*, August 1948, 23.

[107] In America in the 1940s, 'Junior Miss' referred to fashions for young women, while 'teenage' was the preferred term for clothes aimed at girls under the age of 18. In Britain this distinction was blurred, and the two terms were generally used interchangeably by retailers.

[108] *Display Design & Presentation*, August 1948, 23.

In order to create a leisured atmosphere, West End display managers experimented with sound and lighting as part of their display methodologies. At Liberty & Co., teenage customers were often treated to live jazz music in the Young Liberty department, creating an exciting setting more akin to a club than a shop, while Peter Robinson was one of several stores to experiment with the use of colour and lighting.[109] The use of lighting, music and novel displays in these Junior Miss departments suggests that the 1960s fashion boutiques frequented by later teenagers, often said to be descended from the arcades of the nineteenth century and the prêt-a-porter concerns of couture houses, owe an unacknowledged debt to the pioneering department store display managers of the late 1940s.[110]

Austerity fashion shows and the shop girl mannequin

The newly accessible spaces of fashion retail required stores to revisit the old, prewar methods for staging spectacular events. In-store promotions reached an all-time peak in the the 1930s as stores competed to outdo each other.[111] However, the Second World War curtailed these lavish and expensive affairs, and even with the return of peace, such grand and showy promotions no longer felt appropriate for an age of austerity. A new, more accessible approach to retail spectacle was needed.

From 1945 onwards, an increasing number of West End shops began to promote their fashion departments through biannual fashion shows with multiple showings, invite cards, live music, and specially constructed catwalks and sets. While these stores certainly aimed to replicate the imagined glamour and atmosphere of Parisian couture shows, they were put together to create a purposefully more modest and accessible atmosphere.[112] This move to a more informal style of fashion show stems partly from the fact that the origins of these post-war shows lay not in France, but in the oversight of the British government to properly provide for women's wardrobes upon demobilisation from the services after the war. Unlike their male counterparts, demobbed women were not provided with civilian clothing, but rather an amount of

[109] *Display Design & Presentation*, September 1949, 23; 'Colour Influences the Customer'. *Display Design & Presentation*, February 1949, 20.
[110] Fogg, *Boutique: A '60s Cultural Phenomenon*, 56; Pimlott, 'The boutique and the mass market', 1.
[111] Scott and Walker, 'Advertising, promotion, and interwar British department stores', 1108.
[112] In-store shows likely also hoped to cash in on some of the publicity couture shows inspired in the form of column inches of richly descriptive prose and numerous Pathè newsreel reports, broadcast to fashion hungry punters in cinemas across London.

money and coupons, which they were expected to use to select a new outfit to suit their post-war lives. A woman discharged from the ATS, WRNS or WAAF received £12 10 shillings in cash, as well 56 clothing coupons from their unit and another 90 from the Board of Trade, although women from other wartime occupations, such as the Women's Land Army, were not so lucky.[113]

In order to compete for lucrative demob business at a time when spare coupons and clothing money were much envied rarities, several large department stores ran lunch time 'Demob Fashion Shows'. These shows presented a small selection of garments in various combinations, in order to demonstrate the different ways women could spend their demob allowance to create practical but fashionable outfits. The shows were billed as good-will gestures on the part of the stores, who described them as educational events to update women who were out of touch with fashion due to their war service. In reality, they were clever publicity stunts that created exposure by turning fashion departments into news items.[114] Selfridges was particularly adept at exploiting the potential of these shows, managing to get them featured in publications ranging from the trade magazines *Display* and *Draper's Record* to national newspapers such as the *Daily Mail*.[115]

From these humble beginnings, many retailers recognised that small-scale live mannequin shows could be utilised as a highly effective publicity method. The format of the show was adapted to suit the target customer; Marks and Spencer's lingerie shows followed a very traditional set-up, emulating the spaces of couture showings with gold chairs and a raised catwalk to give their mid-market customers a taste of fashionable luxury, while Liberty & Co. appealed to youthful clientele with their 'Young Liberty' shows, where live music helped facilitate a more informal atmosphere.[116] Although the vast majority of in-store fashion shows presented womenswear, certain high-end menswear retailers also attempted to cash-in on this lucrative publicity method. In 1947, Austen Reed held a live mannequin parade in their Regent Street store, although this was kept removed from feminine

[113] Allport, *Demobbed*, 118-126.
[114] 'Dress parade for the demobs', *Daily Mail*, 20 June 1945, 3.
[115] 'Parades', *Display*, September 1945, 31.
[116] Photographs of first post-war lingerie show. Marks and Spencer Archive, P2/88/1/4; *Display*, September 1949, 23.

connotations by referring to it as an 'exhibition' and by the absence of the familiar symbol of the defined catwalk. Instead, the show featured male mannequins casually wandering around a sailing dinghy set dressed in leisurewear and smoking cigarettes through unsmiling, pursed lips.[117]

Unlike the exclusive shows by high-end designers, department store shows were highly accessible and all customers were invited to write to the fashion department to request tickets. Ticketing these shows was a method of crowd control and a convenient way to add names to the store's mailing list, but more than this, tickets served to emphasise that each show was a fashionable event, worthy of excitement. Paper tickets were a material promise of spectacle, marking the event to come as a valuable and important experience and positioning customers as active participants in London fashion.[118] In return, the shows also enhanced the fashionable status of the goods involved. By placing the garments in the setting of a live show, they were presented as the fashions of the moment, emphasizing an immediacy that elevated the fashionable status of the clothes shoppers could find in-store.[119]

The reach of these small-scale events was high due to their accessibility. Stores held multiple showings, in particular during the key months of February and September, in order to meet demand from customers. Peter Robinson took the accessible ideals of the in-store fashion show further by hosting live mannequin shows in their Oxford Circus windows. These proved so popular that, in 1949, one show even resulted in an official police complaint that the event had caused unacceptable pedestrian traffic congestion.[120]

The type of models used in department store shows further supported the accessible ideals that retailers sought to promote through their staging and marketing. Rather than hiring professional live mannequins, the West End branches of both Marks and Spencer and John Lewis often used members of their own staff in fashion shows, a practice that began with the demob shows and fashion shows held privately for staff

[117] *Men's Fashions*, British Pathé, 1947.
[118] Sherlock, *The Performativity of Value*, 143.
[119] This affirmation was especially important at a time when many buying staff openly expressed concerns about whether their stock reflected current trends. See also Miller, *Material Culture and Mass Consumption*, 126.
[120] *Display*, September 1949, 25. A similar show was captured as the subject of a Pathé newsreel in 1948. *Window Fashion Parade*, British Pathé, 1948.

training purposes, but later extended to public shows. The use of staff mannequins was primarily an economic one for stores with small events budgets, as staff could often be persuaded to take part simply with the promise of tea and biscuits, but it also proved that the department store fashion show was not simply a place to show off merchandise: it could also be used by the retailer to make a feature of the fashion credentials of shop staff.[121] While there was certainly a rigorous selection process for staff mannequins, which excluded those staff members deemed to be too unattractive to feature in a fashion show, images of staff modeling in Marks and Spencer lingerie shows (Figure 105) demonstrate a range of figure types and facial features that would not have been seen in professional models at the time. Unlike the (frequently aristocratic) mannequins of fashion photography featured in high-end publications, using everyday members of staff reminded customers that it was the clothes that were the stars; if the clothes were capable of transforming the 'ordinary' shop assistant into the model, they could achieve the same for the customer.[122]

Figure 105:

Marks and Spencer Lingerie show. Marks and Spencer Archive, P2-88-1-8.

[121] 'A store has a fashion parade', *Training News Bulletin*, June 1949. Marks and Spencer Archive, K4.
[122] Although there was a divide between the catwalk and the photographic model at this time, most ready-to-wear shoppers would be most familiar with the photographic models due to their access to magazines. Craik, 'Supermodels and Super Bodies', 404.

Figure 106:

Women in the skirt department at Dickens and Jones, early 1950s. House of Fraser Archive, FRAS 1104/4.

Simultaneously, shop assistants were increasingly expected to perform mannequin-like roles when working in the store, particularly in womenswear and teenage departments. Some stores began to relax staff uniforms, and instead asked staff to dress in clothes from the shop's stock.[123] In this way, staff took on a modelling role as part of their day-to-day jobs. This blurring of the boundaries between display mannequins and live staff in fashion departments can be seen in figure 106, a photograph of the Dickens and Jones skirt department, where the shop staff wear virtually identical outfits to the dressed shop mannequins and stand among them, echoing their poses. Although the use of female shop staff as mannequins could be said to diminish their role as serious figures in the workplace, presented as objects to be inspected rather than knowledgeable sales staff, this role as fashion ambassadors empowered many staff to incorporate their own personalities and opinions into their roles.[124] Aesthetic labour is far from superficial as it involves the entire embodied self,

[123] Photograph of sales staff in fashion department, c.1950-1955. House of Fraser Archive, FRAS 1104/4.

[124] For women who had experienced either service in the armed forces or clerical war jobs in London, the reality of even the most glamorous post-war employment opportunities could easily seem stifling and unfulfilling. While work as a live mannequin might appear glamorous, even the job title was associated with a lack of thought and the empty headed tailor's dummy, associating femininity with 'a kind of mechanical performance'. Evans, 'The Ontology of the Fashion Model', 56-69.

and in-store performances of fashion wearing, whether on the shop floor or makeshift catwalk, confirmed the importance of sales staff as fashionable signposts for consumer tastes.[125]

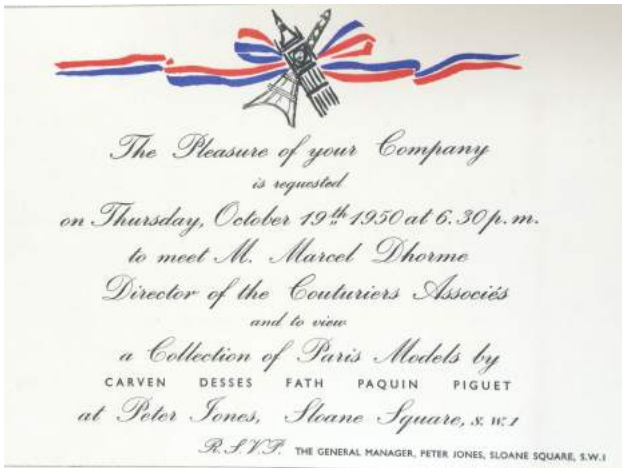

Figure 107:
Peter Jones dress show invite. John Lewis Archive, 3893.

The accessibility of these shows needed to be managed in a way that did not undermine their aspirational aims. Sloane Square department store Peter Jones provides an example of a retailer who creatively balanced the prestige of high-end fashion with accessibility in the changed post-war economic climate. In 1950, the store sent out lavishly thick card invitations for their inaugural 'Couturiers Associés Fashion Show' (figure 107). Edged in gold and featuring symbolically interlocked images of the iconic Eiffel Tower and Big Ben, these invites were clearly intended to impress the recipient. Although the invitations flaunted the show's couture associations, Peter Jones recognised that times had changed and rapid price rises meant that even the affluent customers of Kensington and Chelsea needed to watch their wallets. As such, industry guests were sent a press release alongside the invite that emphasised, with equal prominence, both the status of the designers and the low prices and affordability of the garments.

The scope and vision of Peter Jones's shows sets them apart as events that mark a shift in ready-to-wear retailing. They not only borrowed the trappings of a couture

[125] Entwhistle and Wissinger, 'Keeping up appearances', 774–794.

show, but the designers and their clothes too, bringing the status of designer names directly into the department store space. The inaugural show brought together couture garments from Couturiers Associés members Carven, Desses, Fath, Paquin and Piguet, selected by Peter Jones buyers for a London audience. Next to these garments various 'British made counterparts' were also shown, described as 'exact duplicates' (although these models were ready-to-wear) that were available for a fraction of the price and with no import duties.[126] Peter Jones had found a way to give their customers the best of both worlds—Parisian style, but at an affordable price and in an easily accessible location. However, a closer look at the details of the licensing agreement Peter Jones held with the Couturiers Associés reveals that the garments in this collection were rather more London than Paris; while the labels were authentic, the look was less so, with many models specifically designed using Utility fabrics in order to keep the purchase price as low as possible.

In these shows and collections, Peter Jones had developed a strategy by which it could sell the aspirational qualities of designer fashion in bulk to a fiscally conscious consumer. In doing so, the store eased into a more sustainable business model for the future as it moved away from relying on increasingly uneconomical retail bespoke workrooms towards a focus on ready-to-wear sales. The *John Lewis Review* reported that the shows were considered a success in terms of putting the store 'on the map as a fashion house', and Peter Jones's dress sales nearly doubled from £7,396 in 1950 to £13,779 in 1951.[127] Ultimately, in spite of the high-fashion associations of these shows and the new approach, sales of the French collections were primarily comprised of the less expensive gowns, indicating that prices played an important role in purchasing decisions, even for the most fashion conscious consumers.

Peter Jones was able to successfully mix couture and ready-to-wear fashions in a single show because the boundaries between the two had become increasingly blurred in post-war London. Couture houses were beginning to embrace ready-to-wear as a future market for their businesses, with leading figures such as Victor Stiebel designing for Jacqmar. In 1952, Hardy Amies even brought ready-to-wear collections into the same space as his bespoke designs by opening his first in-house

[126] Peter Jones Fashion Show reports. John Lewis Archive, 3893.
[127] Peter Jones Department Reviews, 1950-1952. John Lewis Archive, 2573/e.

boutique. At the same time, ready-to-wear manufacturers such as Horrockses had learned to emulate couture methods of fashion dissemination in the events they staged at their Hanover Square premises and the LMHG even advertised their extravagant ready-to-wear shows on the pages of *Vogue* in order to liken them to events organised by IncSoc.[128] By carefully and strategically navigating this changing fashion landscape, many department stores cemented their status as part of the lively network of seasonal fashion events in the West End and, as a result, their shows contributed to the growing prestige of London's West End as a place to see and obtain the latest fashions.

The long-term impact of post-war spectacle on West End retail

The shopping streets of the West End seldom feature in the grand story of post-war reconstruction in London, which is dominated by the large-scale (and largely unfulfilled) plans of Patrick Abercrombie.[129] Unlike the retail centres of Bristol or Coventry, where the blitz necessitated almost total rebuilding, and enabled a modern reimagining of the shopping space, London's West End was badly damaged but, for the most part, largely recognisable as the same shopping space in 1945 that it had been in 1939. Although the frontages of Oxford and Regent Streets contained many prominent gaps, the majority of shop buildings still stood. The continued trading of many of the same businesses on the same sites gave the impression of business as usual in the post-war era, masking the startlingly modern changes to London retail that occurred behind the Portland stone facades during the immediate post-war years.

This retail modernisation remains largely unacknowledged, at least in part due to the vested interests of retailers in preserving the heritage status of West End consumption. By this time, the West End was already a long-established centre for fashionable consumption; although the shops of Oxford Street could be seen as a mismatch of tired and old-fashioned Victorian relics, retailers placed a high value on

[128] Horrockses show invitation card, Joyce Badrocke papers. Archive of Art and Design, AAD/2009/4; *Vogue*, November 1947, 18.
[129] Self, 'The Evolution of the Greater London Plan', 145-75.

the historic fabric on which the area's reputation was built.[130] Abercrombie's County of London Plan may have advocated decentralisation and zoning,[131] but the West End's historic street pattern and mixed land use, where retailers operated cheek-by-jowl with small-scale garment workshops, would remain the bedrock of London fashion consumption in the immediate post-war years.

The particular nature of this space and its retailing heritage is clearly present in the conflicted version of modernity that emerged in the design of fashion departments. As this section on West End spectacle has demonstrated in its discussion of Junior Miss departments, many retailers found inspiration in the startlingly modern layout and appearance of American fashion departments, with the trade magazine *Display* running regular features detailing the refurbishment of stores such as Saks Fifth Avenue and Neiman Marcus. In particular, the trend towards open-plan spaces, in which clean, white surfaces and chrome finishes were shown off by bright lighting, were lauded as the pinnacle of retail design.[132] When Hulme Chadwick, an architect and designer who would later work extensively on the 1951 Festival of Britain, was tasked by Eric Lucking with creating the new 'Young Liberty' fashion department at Liberty & Co., his brief was to create an aesthetic that turned its back on the heritage of the Liberty brand. Chadwick rendered the famous interior of the Arts and Crafts department store unrecognisable by completely covering its dark wood paneling with cheap board panels painted white and mirrors, lit by stark halogen strip lighting. To reflect the style of the new department's décor, merchandise was presented sparingly and in an uncluttered manner, making a feature of stock shortages. In doing so, the Young Liberty department was visually and conceptually separated from the shop's exposed wood beams that overlooked its stacks of richly decorated oriental rugs and intricately printed fabrics. In stating the store's modern fashionable credentials through this new department's interior, Lucking cast aside Liberty's somewhat old-fashioned reputation, and in doing so laid the foundations for the fashionable rebirth of the old Tudor shop and its dress fabrics in the 1950s and 1960s.[133]

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[130] Breward, *The Hidden Consumer;* Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure*; Edwards, 'Shaping the Fashion City', 159.
[131] It can also be argued that 1940s planners were largely hostile to fashionable consumption due to its associations with feminine frivolity. Edwards, 'Shaping the Fashion City', 159, 164.
[132] *Display Design & Presentation*, July 1947, 16-17.
[133] Buruma, *Liberty & Co. in the Fifties and Sixties*, 7.

It is worth noting that, while many women's fashion departments were redecorated in line with unquestionably modern aesthetics, some menswear retailers exhibited considerable caution, keen to balance modernism with the brand values of British heritage that had long-associated London with high-end luxury retail for men. Menswear specialist Austin Reed demonstrated this balance in the redesign of their Regent Street store interior. Rather than opting for a bright and open modern look throughout the store, they incorporated elements of open space and modern industrial design into their ground floor ready-to-wear department, while retaining wood paneling on the upper floor, which was the home of their made-to-measure services.[134] The far-reaching influence of London's consumer heritage on the rebuilding of the West End post-war can be seen in these differences between the design of men and women's retail spaces, highlighting the complex relationship between modernity and the architecture of the area's fashionable legacy in a space still mourning the losses to the built environment suffered during the blitz.

These conflicted ideas of progress are concealed by the buoyantly optimistic trade publications and store publicity from the period, which make the rapid post-war rebuilding of fashionable consumer cultures in the West End seem almost inevitable. It is important to remember that these press sources do not reflect all retailers; large stores such as Liberty & Co. recognised that they had a great deal to gain from projecting an image of unstoppable modernity, and their management worked hard to ensure that images of exciting window displays, store refurbishments and promotional events were circulated widely to media outlets.[135]

The changing face of fashion display and promotion during this period shaped the course of British fashion retail for the coming decades, even foreshadowing the youthful aesthetics of the 1960s.[136] Most importantly, the unusual and innovative

[134] *Display*, August 1947, 18.
[135] Eric Lucking papers, correspondence with Arthur Liberty. Archive of Art and Design, AAD/1986/8.
[136] It could be argued that these methodologies later had negative consequences for the department stores whose post-war ascent they aided. The arrival of the teenage fashion department marked the beginning of a much larger retail trend towards department stores encouraging fashionable consumption amongst the youth market through a 'store-within-a-store' model of retail. This trend, which started with Woollands 21 Shop, resulted in the launch of Peter Robinson's in-store 'Top Shop' in 1964, followed by the fashion forward 'Miss Selfridge' in 1966. These lucrative offshoots were ultimately to the detriment of the department store; in 1973, Top Shop's youth focus proved so profitable that it launched as a separate entity from its parent store, and its numbers multiplied while

fashion displays seen in the West End in the late 1940s seem to have played a role in promoting London as a destination for fashionable consumption to an international audience after the disruption of the Second World War. West End window displays and individual designers such as Eric Lucking developed an international reputation.[137] This was important for the export trade of the British fashion industry, which relied on London as its sales window and was engaged in exceptionally fierce competition with both New York and Paris fashion following the war.[138] The West End's international reputation was also important for attracting tourist custom, particularly following the devaluation of the pound in 1949, and many central retailers opened specialist export shops in store (figure 108).[139] The spectacle of new department store interiors, displays and events played an important role in attracting overseas visitors, and by the late 1940s shops such as Simpson's and Burberry's were explicitly marketing to British and international tourists by featuring fashion displays with 'London' signifiers as props, including images of double-decker buses, display mannequins dressed as uniformed guardsmen, and even fragments of wall intended to resemble the ruins of the blitz.[140] It is highly likely that this rich visual culture contributed to the £8,000,000 that Harold Wilson estimated tourists spent 'on goods to take back home' in 1948.[141]

Cementing the West End's fashionable reputation at this moment had long reaching consequences for the future of both London retail and the British garment industry. As clothing businesses increasingly outsourced production to the North of England and Ireland, London moved from a city with a reputation for making high-end garments to one who's fashionable reputation relied symbolism and image.[142]

Peter Robinson entered a spiral of terminal decline. Ashmore, 'I think they're all mad', 73*;* Burton Group Ltd papers, West Yorkshire Archive Services, WYL1951.

[137] In 1951, *Fortune* described West End window displays and Eric Lucking as 'world-class'. *Fortune,* April 1951, 32.

[138] See Elizabeth Ewing's descriptions of the post-war promotion of British fashion through its association with London by the Incorporated Society of London Fashion Designers and the London Model House Group. Ewing, *History of 20th Century Fashion*, 47.

[139] Kynaston, *Austerity Britain*, 350.

[140] *Display Design & Presentation*, January 1951, 36; *Display Design & Presentation*, June 1951, 37. *Display Design & Presentation*, November 1951, 25.

[141] 'Bond Street is the shop window of the world'. *Display*, December 1948, 15.

[142] The late 1940s saw a number of London manufacturers focus their reconstruction and expand their operations outside of the capital, with new factory growth particularly concentrated in Yorkshire and South Wales. The employment opportunities created by these moves can be seen in the plethora of job advertisements for machinists to work at 'large' gown and coat manufacturers 'in the North of England'. See, for example, *Draper's Record*, 14 April 1945, 45 and *Draper's Record*, 4 January 1947, 3. See also Gilbert, 'From Paris to Shanghai', 27.

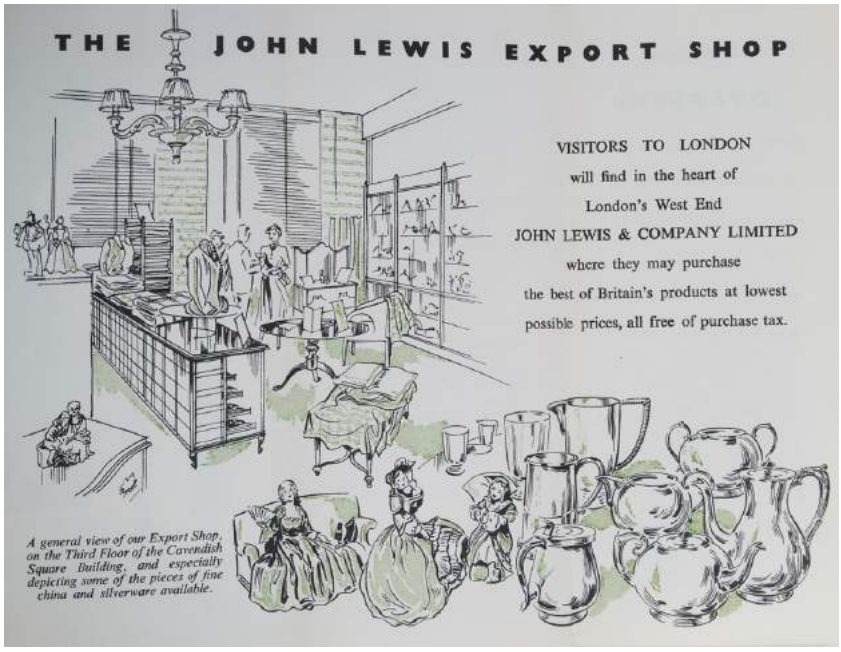

Figure 108:

John Lewis shop map for tourists, which directed visitors to goods that they might wish to purchase as souvenirs, such as cashmere cardigans. John Lewis Archive, 359/d3.

Retailers who had previously relied on the quality of London-made bespoke and wholesale garments to provide a unique draw to their fashion departments needed to find a new way to publicise themselves now that they primarily stocked brand-name ready-to-wear fashions, which were also carried by a number of other stores. It is likely that the experimental and forward-looking actions of publicity and display managers such as Natasha Kroll and Eric Lucking at the early stages of this transition played a role in enabling London's reputation to grow in subsequent decades by cementing the West End's continuing role as the symbolic centre of British fashion at a time when its status was far from certain.

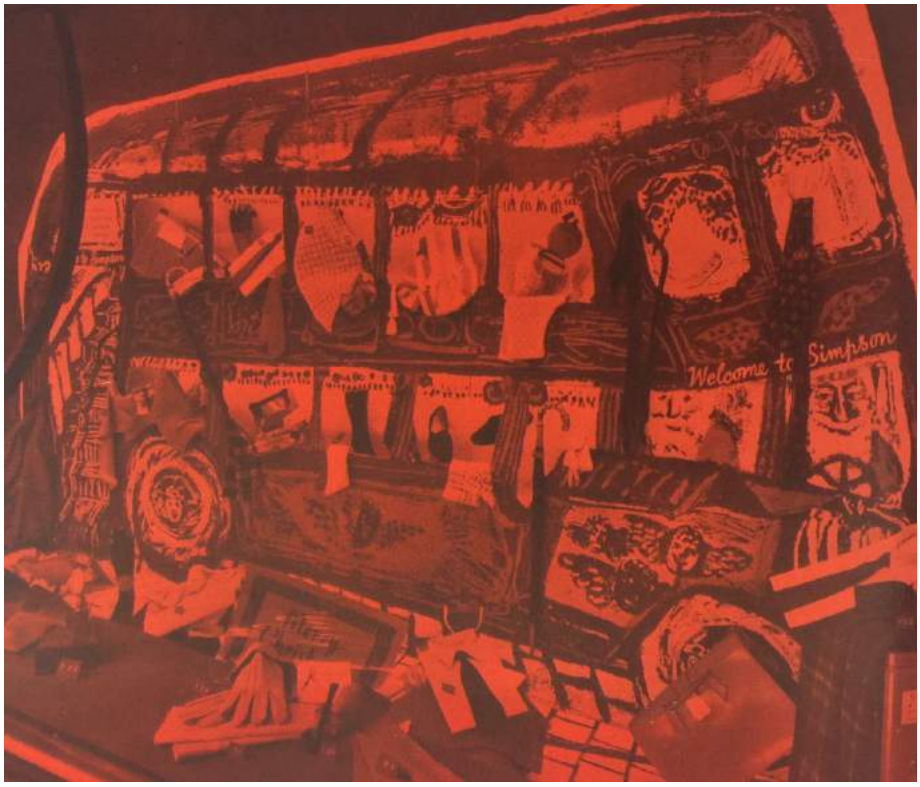

Figure 109:

Double-decker bus window display by Natasha Kroll for Simpson's. *Display,* January 1951, 36.

Bentalls of Kingston Upon Thames: the post-war prosperity of a suburban department store

London's suburbs have an uncomfortable relationship with histories of the fashion city. There is a general understanding that 'London' fashion originates primarily from the city centre, and trickles out in a diluted form to the suburbs. This assumption colours the way that the geographies of fashionable consumption are understood by concentrating attention on the West End. However, while the British shopping experience in the first half of the twentieth century may have been divided into a hierarchy of urban, suburban and provincial retailers, archival material indicates that this relationship was more complicated, and its flows more circular, in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War.[143]

Figure 110:
Bentalls exterior 1948, showing 1935 frontage. Bentalls Archive.

The war exacerbated divisions between the city's various retail centres. Broadly speaking, bomb damage compounded already existing socio-economic inequalities between the working class east and middle class west London suburbs, the latter of which escaped the worst of the Luftwaffe's destruction.[144] Areas to the east and south east of the city that suffered badly from war damage struggled to keep pace with new retail developments in the late 1940s as they concentrated on making their premises

[143] Edwards, 'West End Shopping with *Vogue*', 34.
[144] See air raid damage files for London. TNA, HO 192/328-809.

fit for purpose. *Display* frequently lamented the slow pace of change present in these areas with exasperated headlines such as 'Penge seems to still be at war' and articles that criticised shabby and old-fashioned suburban display as holding back progress in the field of fashion retail.[145] Yet, in spite of the publication's West End bias, *Display* regularly featured exciting display and promotional activities from retailers in more affluent suburban areas who were directly challenging the supremacy of the West End through their post-war activities.[146]

Chief amongst these retailers was Bentalls, a large department store located on the very edge of London in the historic Surrey market town of Kingston Upon Thames. Founded as a draper's shop in 1867 by Frank Bentall, the store expanded with the creation of new neighbouring suburbs, such as Motspur Park, during south west London's interwar building boom. Bentalls's growing success was fueled by the subsequent influx of suburban affluence, enabling the store to open a large new building in 1935 that was inspired by the grand architecture of nearby Hampton Court Palace (figure 110). Although Bentalls's day-to-day activities were interrupted by the arrival of war, its physical holdings escaped the blitz relatively unscathed—unlike its West End counterparts. This gave Bentalls something of a head start in the post-war race to re-establish fashionable consumption habits because it allowed the store to allocate resources to cosmetic alterations rather than structural rebuilding. The store was also in an unusually strong financial position at this time because the company was successfully floated on the London Stock Exchange in 1946, freeing up a large amount of capital that was then invested in building improvements and expansion to other suburban areas such as Ealing and Worthing.[147]

Bentalls's post-war plans for their Kingston store were especially ambitious. The store's remodeling involved large-scale artistic commissions—such as the grand new murals created for the walls of the escalator hall—that seem at odds with broader cultures of shortages and economic uncertainty in London at the time.[148] The confidence with which Bentalls approached selling fashion at a time of austerity

[145] *Display*, February 1946, 48.
[146] It is important to note that *Display* did not have a staff photographer, but published photographs sent in by retailers. This led to a certain West End bias since it was the large stores such as Liberty that had the greatest resources to photograph their displays.
[147] Bentall, *Bentalls, My Store of Memories*, 235-236.
[148] Unlabeled photograph album. Bentalls Archive.

merits further attention, and this section looks to the store's business archive in order to investigate how Bentalls used spectacle in different ways from their West End counterparts in order to compete for custom by constructing—and celebrating—a specifically suburban type of fashionable identity. These archives reveal that Bentalls's post-war success was not merely a happy accident of suburban location, but the result of fiercely competitive adoption of the latest retail techniques. Bentalls understood that, while it may be physically separate from the stores of the West End, it was in direct competition with them for custom. As such, Bentalls was an earlier adopter and a pioneer of many post-war changes, taking more inspiration from international trends than from those seen in the West End. This competitive relationship with central London shopping is clearly demonstrated in the movement of sought after staff from the centre to suburb, and the appointments pages of the *Bentalls Staff News Bulletin* in the immediate post-war period boast of the many new people joining the business from very well respected West End stores.[149]

Bentalls's archive contains some particularly revealing material about publicity methods in the form of carefully compiled press clippings and photograph albums. These albums span the period from the late 1930s to the early 1970s, but the bulk of the photographs (and those that show the fullest range of store activities) cover the immediate post-war period into the mid 1950s. The albums from the late 1940s are carefully annotated in neat handwriting, describing details of store events and the significance of new interior features in a manner that indicates the confidence and pride, as well as the careful monitoring, Bentalls had in their approach to retailing during this period. Close looking at the details of the albums and their construction demonstrates that Bentalls was an undeniably modern store at the cutting edge of retail research, but at the same time also a distinctly suburban shop, with an identity distinct from that of its West End rivals.

In order to understand Bentalls's careful negotiation of what it meant to sell fashion in suburbia, it is helpful to consider the nature of its customers in the late 1940s. Although Bentalls had a wide-reaching reputation during the post-war period, and regularly featured in national magazines such as *Vogue*, the newspaper adverts in its

[149] For example, a Mrs D. C. Neely who moved from Simpson's to become Bentalls's blouse and skirt buyer in April 1948. *Bentalls Staff News Bulletin*, April 1948. Bentalls Archive.

press albums indicate that it considered its primary target audience to be inhabitants of London's south west suburbs, followed by the surrounding counties of Surrey and Middlesex.[150] In many ways, the relationship between Bentalls and London was mirrored by the cultural identity of its local clientele, which can be glimpsed in Barry Appleby's cartoon family, the Gambols. Although the Gambols came to embody a more general idea of suburbia through their appearances in the *Daily Express* from March 1950 onwards, Appleby originally drew heavily upon his home town of Kingston Upon Thames as a source of inspiration.[151] The Gambols demonstrated a suburban identity that was both part of the city and also distanced from what it deemed to be the more unsavory aspects of metropolitan life. They often shopped and worked in the urban centre, taking advantage of its benefits, but were primarily concerned with local and domestic routines. The Gambols felt a sense of belonging and duty in the living room, the local shop and the golf course, but not necessarily to the city beyond that.

Bentalls similarly celebrated its suburban status as a place both of the city and comfortably removed from it. Bentalls recognised the fashionable selling power of the London brand, and frequently appropriated London symbols such as bus stop signs in window displays. The store also aligned its promotional activities to London based events, including the 1948 Olympic Games. In its marketing materials, Bentalls highlighted that it was possible to be at the centre of London retail without being geographically centred. Publicists confidently referred to the Kingston branch as a 'London shop', for example declaring that 'Sun Comes to London' in a 1947 summer beachwear promotion, whilst simultaneously promoting the convenience of suburban shopping over the hectic experience of the West End. Bentalls's advertising made a particular feature of their description as an 'out of town shop' in *Vogue* and *Harper's Bazaar's* lists of recommended stockists, because they could use this to position themselves as the best of both worlds in their proximity to central London, only '15 minutes from Waterloo' by train, but with ample space for car parking and a more relaxed atmosphere.[152]

[150] Unlabeled press clippings scrapbook. Bentalls Archive.
[151] Kynaston, *Austerity Britain*, 503.
[152] Unlabeled press cuttings scrapbook. Bentalls Archive.

Bentalls's successful suburban balancing act was also present in their approach to modern aesthetics and fashionable spectacle. Many of their print adverts between 1946 and 1950 feature the tag line 'The Modern Store by the Royal River', encapsulating the suburban balance of modernity and traditional values.[153] The store countered sleek, modern department interiors with more traditional decorative themes elsewhere, most notably in the still life quality of their new murals, which depicted realist representations of traditional British flora across the four seasons (figure 111). Bentalls's version of post-war spectacle aimed to provide a reassuring vision of social change, one which focused on the promise of increased prosperity and leisure while also providing a reassuring sense of continuity. These brand values were carefully cultivated through their events schedule, for example in their choice to stage a display of historical costumes to celebrate the festival of Britain (and in their accepted invitation to Queen Mary to visit it), which positioned the store as a point of continuation in a changing world.[154] Bentalls wished to be seen as a place to go, but also as a place to belong.

Figure 111:
Murals in the escalator hall. Bentalls Archive.

[153] 'We've Captured the Sun'. *Display*, August 1947, 15.
[154] 'Queen Mary visits to view display of historical costumes' *Bentalls Staff News*, June 1951. Bentalls Archive.

Selling Bentalls as a fashionable destination

Bentalls had benefited from the construction of a new bypass through Kingston in the 1930s, making the store a convenient place to shop for the growing number of suburban households who owned their own cars.[155] But in the difficult economic climate of post-war Britain, the store realised that, in order to continue this upward trend in sales, they needed to make Bentalls a retail destination that consumers would seek out for reasons over and above mere convenience. Bentalls's primary marketing strategy in the post-war period was to sell shopping as a leisure activity, rather than a necessary means to obtain needed goods, as had been the majority experience during the war years.

During this time, Bentalls undertook various investment projects in the store's infrastructure in line with this strategy. For example, car parking facilities were expanded and a hair salon and crèche were opened, particularly in order to encourage female customers to spend prolonged periods of time in the store to try and capitalise on the increased amount of leisure time that new technology had afforded affluent housewives. Bentalls promoted itself as a one stop shop, where you could arrive in comfort by car and spend the whole day. An advert from 1947, titled 'Always at your service!', listed some of the extensive services the shop offered, including fabric cleaning and dying; car servicing; cabinet making; pharmacy; entertainment booking; and insurance brokers.[156] Another advertisement explicitly invited customers to 'Spend a day at Bentalls', reminding them that the store was a pleasurable leisure destination: 'Bentalls, along with its unrivalled facilities for shopping, offers you the opportunities to relax and enjoy an excellent meal' in one of its several cafes and restaurants, as well as the chance to plan other leisure activities through the store's theatre ticket booking and travel agency.[157] The advert also reminded customers that the store was open until 7 p.m. on Fridays, a pioneering move that recognised later opening hours enabled those who worked in the city to shop without the Saturday crowds—after years of shortages, shopping without a queue was a luxury in itself.

[155] Scott and Walker, 'Advertising, promotion, and interwar British department stores', 1108.
[156] Unlabeled press clippings file. Bentalls Archive.
[157] Unlabeled press clippings file. Bentalls Archive.

Bentalls's publicity team made the store's fashion offering a key part of its destination status. This was due in no small part to the skills of their display manager, J. H. Pryor, who was particularly interested in the potential of using fashion goods to experiment with new methodologies in the emerging field of display design. Pryor was highly respected, and his name was frequently mentioned in *Display* alongside the other notable practitioners of the era, including both Natasha Kroll and Eric Lucking.[158] Pryor recognised that spectacular display was particularly important for the suburban store, and could be used to draw people to make a special trip to Kingston, not just tempt local crowds. Pryor's most successful demonstration of this theory may be the 1947 'We've Captured the Sun' summer fashion window displays. Like Kroll and Lucking's work at Simpson's and Liberty's, these visually arresting modern windows were not merely intended to advertise products, but to advertise the entire store. However, unlike Bentalls's West End counterparts, the windows in this campaign were promoted as an event in themselves, with adverts placed in local and London-wide papers that invited people to come and view the window displays as a leisure activity, making no mention of the goods they promoted.[159]

Once at the store, customers then needed to be encouraged to stay, and Pryor also played an important role in the redesign and visual merchandising of fashion departments with this aim in mind. The financial resources from the shop's stock market floatation enabled Bentalls to undertake large-scale refurbishments of a number of its sales departments in line with contemporary selling methods and modern aesthetics. These renovations placed fashion at the geographical centre of the store, with a number of departments relocated in order to make space for a new Junior Miss department in 1947 and to relocate the women's shoe department to a prominent ground floor location in 1948.

Bentalls's Junior Miss department was one of the first in the country, predating many of its West End counterparts. The department was the flagship opening within the store's wider modernisation scheme, and as such provided a testing ground for many new retail methods. Bentalls were particularly interested in creating a space in which young female consumers could feel a sense of belonging and ownership. They wished

[158] 'Promise of Spring'. *Display*, March 1947, 19.
[159] Unlabeled press cuttings scrapbook. Bentalls Archive.

the department to be somewhere for these new consumers to gather and try on clothes, without pressure to purchase or move on elsewhere. The layout of the department was designed towards this end. It was conspicuously less formal than the main women's dress department, with racks of clothes placed sporadically at uneven intervals and odd angles, which would have encouraged browsing and self-selection (figure 113). To display fashionable tableaus, the department borrowed the winding island designs that had been so successful at the *Britain Can Make It* exhibition the year before. These islands allowed the department to create clean, white surfaces without covering over the store's decoratively tiled floors (much loved by existing customers), and to incorporate modern spot lighting in a flexible way. However, to give the islands a more informal appeal, they were decorated with canopies that evoked a lively market stall atmosphere. Like an exhibition, the winding islands encouraged customers to follow a meandering browsing route, while those paying close attention were rewarded by spotting humorous styling details, such as display mannequins accompanied by toy dogs or climbing stuffed monkeys. These irreverent details were changed frequently along with the garments displayed, adding a subtle sense of spectacle and novelty to shopping in the department.

Figure 112:
Opening of the Junior Miss department at Bentalls, 1947. Bentalls Archive.

Figure 113:
Teenage dress feature showing brightly coloured fabric swatches. *The Maker-Up*, March 1947, 147.

Looking at the patterned fabrics shown in the black and white images that survive of the Junior Miss department alongside editorials about teenage fashion in *The Maker-Up*, which contain fabric swatches (figure 113), reveals that the department would have been a colourful affair thanks to the variety of fabrics on both the clothes rails and staff members. Unlike the staff from the store's other fashion departments, Junior Miss sales assistants wore items from the department's stock rather than the store's official uniform (Figure 114). They were also noticeably younger than their counterparts in womenswear, as they were intended to be approachable figures of fashionable aspiration for the young consumer rather than matronly figures didactically imposing stylistic constraints on youthful experiments in fashion.

The Junior Miss department was also at the forefront of experiments in coloured lighting. Merchandise director Rowan Bentall recognised that technological advancements in artificial lighting were integral to the interior design of the store's new dress departments. The use of fluorescent lighting not only helped to create a

modern feel, but research suggested it could also be used to influence a customer's purchasing decisions. In 1948, Bentalls reported that to the retail press that coloured lighting and painting did seem to have a positive effect on customer experience and sales; according to Bentalls, soft pink tones were particularly effective in the womenswear department, as they complimented customers complexions, whereas brighter colours such as greens and egg shell blues were more popular in the Junior Miss department.[160]

Figure 114:
Junior Miss sales staff at Bentalls, 1947. Bentalls Archive.

The styling of the Junior Miss department combined aspects of modernity and tradition, mixing old wooden display rails and the beloved tiled floors with contemporary steel display islands (figure 115). The consistency of this styling suggests this technique was purposeful, as does the careful way in which its aesthetics stretch outside of the Junior Miss department. Design features from the department—such as the striped display canopies—were incorporated into the outward facing display windows, creating a coherent and recognisable look for Bentalls's youth brand (figure 116). Compared to the stark, white modernity of Liberty & Co.'s Young Liberty department, Bentalls's Junior Miss department had a more

[160] *Display*, February 1949, 20.

comfortable, and perhaps more welcoming, aesthetic. It mixed modern features with more reassuringly familiar pieces of furniture that lent the department, and its new teenage demographic, a sense of continuity and intergenerational connection to the store's history.

Figure 115:

Display rails and island in Junior Miss department, 1947. Bentalls Archive.

Figure 116:

Exterior window display by J. H. Pryor to mark the launch of the Junior Miss department, 1947. Bentalls Archive.

This strategic balance between modern design and tradition within Bentalls's post-war plans may have helped facilitate the successful launch and appeal of the Junior Miss department by creating a playful destination that engaged its target consumer, but traditional approaches to retailing ultimately hindered new experiments in established retail elsewhere in the store, in particular within menswear. The immediate post-war years saw growth in both men's and women's fashion sales.[161] However, despite its importance, menswear was granted far less attention in post-war discussions about methodologies for retail publicity, reflecting that the practices of even the most forward-looking display managers and publicists were still rooted in older cultural assumptions that pleasurable consumption was primarily the realm of women.[162] While womenswear display and advertising blossomed, publications such as *Display* continued to advise menswear retailers that, in order to attract masculine attention, display designers should avoid 'spectacular' window displays and stick to more sober visual merchandising.[163]

That the broader menswear retail culture remained rooted in traditional marketing methods during this period further accentuates the bold and daring nature of Bentalls's decision to open a male youth fashion department, one of the only such departments in the country at this time. The 'Young Man's Shop' was launched in February 1950 to much fanfare and publicity. Aiming to replicate the success of Bentalls's Junior Miss department, the Young Man's Shop promised 'specially styled clothing' at low prices for the 'awkward' ages between 16 and 20.[164] The department also stocked a range of shoes, reflecting an understanding that the the younger consumer wanted something different and was likely more interested in 'fancy straps,

[161] In 1950, *The Outfitter* reported that 'Sales of men's and boy's apparel by large scale retailers' were up 14 per cent. on the previous year and, perhaps more importantly, 'showed a greater expansion than sales of womenswear'. *The Outfitter*, 15 July 1950, 17.
[162] Menswear retailers were particularly keen on emphasising the heritage of London consumption, with Austen Reed directly likening its contemporary clothing to the Dandies who had walked past the store's Regent Street site in the past, displaying casual suits next to images of fashionable eighteenth century men. *Display*, August 1947, 18.
[163] This in spite of evidence of a post-war rise of colourful, casual men's fashions. As *Display* noted in 1950, there was not only a 'growing West End interest in men's wear' but also in 'the faint touches of fashion appeal which are now applied to it', especially in relation to the emergence of bright colours, exemplified by a rainbow of waistcoats displayed in the Burlington Arcade. *Display*, July 1948, 13.
[164] 'Kingston Store Open's Young Man's Shop'. *Men's Wear*, 7 February 1950. Unlabeled press clippings file. Bentalls Archive.

thick crepe soles and bright colours' than his father.[165] Although Bentalls was successful in pioneering the Junior Miss department, this gamble did not pay off, and the Young Man's Shop closed after less than a year. The store's staff newsletter explained that the closure was largely the result of the difficulty that buyers experienced in stocking a range of garments that were sufficiently distinct from those sold in the main menswear department. However, it is notable that the store's photograph albums do not contain a single image of either the Young Man's Shop or any window displays relating to it, in stark contrast to the Junior Miss department which was given a regular dedicated window and features heavily throughout the 1950-1951 photograph album.[166] Perhaps the department might have had a better chance of success had the store's publicity team dedicated as much attention to the Young Man as they did to the Junior Miss.

Celebrating suburban style

Once the customer was successfully enticed into the store, spectacle still had a role to play in persuading them to make a purchase. The physical changes made to Bentalls in these post-war years demonstrate that the store had much more in common with its West End counterparts than many other—more conservative—provincial or suburban retailers. At the same time, the store was different in its layout, publicity and stock than many in the West End, as Bentalls recognised that its local customers had specific tastes and needs to be catered for. Bentalls never sneered at its suburban customers, but rather used publicity to openly celebrate its suburban identity and its difference to stores in the West End. In doing so, it won both custom and considerable loyalty from shoppers.

Like West End stores, the most important promotional activities in Bentalls's fashion departments occurred in spring and autumn, following the couture shows in Paris and London. Bentalls staged special window displays, fashion shows and in-store promotional events to coincide with these seasonal shows, using the timing of these to signal to customers that the store's buyers were responding quickly to bring the

[165] 'Young Man's Shoe Shop'. *The Shoe and Leather Record*, 9 February 1950. Unlabeled press clippings file. Bentalls Archive.
[166] The manner in which the albums were compiled month-by-month indicates this is not due to retrospective editing of an unsuccessful venture.

latest trends emerging from the shows back to Kingston—in spite of the fact that, in all actuality, orders would have been placed well before this—and this sent a clear message to local customers that the suburbs were no less up-to-date with global trends than the city centre.

Figure 117:
'Paris is our inspiration' window display, 1949. Bentalls Archive.

Figure 118:
Parisian backdrop for a fashion show in the Wolsey Suite, 1949. Bentalls Archive.

Bentalls's drew particularly heavily on promotions that tied their fashion department to the glamour of Paris. In spring 1949, Bentalls declared that 'Paris is our inspiration' in a multi-platform campaign that reflected a consistency typical of Bentalls's publicity at the time, stretching from printed adverts to store window displays and featuring sketches of clothes by French designers displayed alongside aesthetically similar items from their own ready-to-wear stock.[167] Unlike Peter Jones, however, Bentalls was particularly adept at exploiting the appeal of international styles from Paris without using the actual products.

Bentalls may have staged their bi-annual shows in front of a lavishly painted backdrop of Parisian landmarks (figure 118), but the clothes they featured had been selected to appeal to local tastes.[168] The shows even aimed to physically represent local consumers by using live mannequins of various ages, reflecting the target suburban market.[169] Furthermore, images of the store's fashion shows and fashion displays demonstrate that buyers did not simply select stock in response to well-publicised designer collections, but interpreted emerging trends for a local, suburban audience.[170] Bentalls's fashion buyers invested considerable time and resources in understanding local tastes. In articles written for *Bentalls Staff News Bulletin*, the buyers frequently discuss their role as filters for new fashions, understanding that tastes evolve slowly and that they must balance new trends against this.[171] They also openly shun certain trends because they will be unflattering to many of their clients, reminding sales staff that their job is to sell customers clothes that they will enjoy, whoever they happen to be.[172]

Bentalls's fashion shows were notable events in the area and, as a result of this filtering process, Bentalls's buyers played an important role in shaping tastes due to the central role that the store played in disseminating fashion at a local level. The

[167] Photographs of the 'Paris is our inspiration' window and advertising campaign, 1949. Bentalls Archive.
[168] Photograph of fashion parade in the Wolsey suite, February 1951. Bentalls Archive.
[169] Unlike their West End counterparts, Bentalls presented styles intended for older women on appropriately aged models. Unlabeled photograph album, 1947-1950. Bentalls Archive.
[170] Photograph of Joyce Shoes promotion, 1947. Bentalls Archive.
[171] This is especially true in relation to the shock of the longer skirts of the New Look, and buyers instruct staff to recognise that many will consider this trend to be impractical, and so customers should be reassured that London styles will not be as extreme as in Paris or New York. 'Going Down', *Bentalls Staff News Bulletin*, October 1947. Bentalls Archive.
[172] *Bentalls Staff News Bulletin*, May 1947. Bentalls Archive.

merchandise featured in these shows was given great publicity, enabling consumer knowledge about new season styles to be spread to both customers attending the shows and those reading about them in the local press. A range of local papers in West London and Surrey devoted almost the entirety of their periodic fashion coverage to Bentalls's biannual shows, which they marked with double-page spreads, utilising the professional photographs provided by the store. The text that accompanied these images discussed the season's new trends, presenting the garments selected and shown by the local store as the exclusive source of breaking news about new fashion trends for the forthcoming season.[173] These newspaper articles make clear that the live fashion show was more than just a means of generating publicity—it actively positioned the store as the central site of local fashion information and consumption and gave the store a privileged position as both the authority on and arbiter of fashions in the area.

Figure 119:

Bentalls illustrated fashion advert, May 1947. Bentalls Archive.

[173] Unlabeled press clippings album. Bentalls Archive.

These glamorous shows were followed by adverts placed in the local press, which brought together the high-fashion illustration styles popularised by figures such as Francis Marshall with practical information about the price of the garment, its materials and the number of coupons it required (figure 119). These adverts were markedly different from those placed by stores such as Harrods and Harvey Nichols, which rather showed an illustrated garment with text that boasted of its designer associations.[174] The text of Bentalls's adverts often described the new fashions depicted in terms of their suitability for suburban life and employed a respectful tone that indicated the Bentalls consumer possessed both good practical sensibilities and a high level of fashionable knowledge, for example describing a hooded coat as 'wonderfully warm and comfortable, yet oh so fashion-right … they are wonderful coupon value'.[175] The combined effect of the adverts and the shows assured customers of their own fashionable tastes, giving them confidence to purchase new styles and embrace the growing use of self-service across Bentalls's fashion departments.

The publicity team further built on this sense of suburban self-confidence with the production of a series of promotional fashion postcards in the mid to late 1940s (figure 120). The front of these postcards featured images of new fashion lines recently brought into the womenswear department. Information about the garment and its price was printed onto a small perforated section on the bottom of the card, which invited the customer to 'tear off and use Post Card for your own correspondence', while keeping details of the latest designs. These attractive and colourful cards were distributed at events and in-store. They acted primarily as adverts for new fashion stock, but they also served as an invitation for customers to confidently demonstrate their own fashionable taste and knowledge by sharing new fashions with friends and family.

The cumulative effect of Bentalls's promotional activities during this time amounted to more than just assuring local customers of their fashionable tastes: it actively celebrated the specific fashion cultures of suburbia as discerning, affluent, leisured and happily different from those found in the city centre. These local tastes were

[174] *The Tatler and Bystander*, 29 April 1948; unlabeled press clippings album. Bentalls Archive.
[175] Unlabeled press clippings file. Bentalls Archive.

Figure 120:

Promotional fashion postcards by Bentalls, c.1944-1947. Own collection.

catered for in the growth of the store's leisure-wear offerings—having opened a new women's sportswear department in October 1948—and in the design of displays that celebrated the comfortable, leisured lifestyle of the ideal suburban existence.[176] A key part of Bentalls's suburban identity was a proud refusal to show any concession to the constraints of post-war shortages, and the store's fashion promotions strongly evoked a pride that, for the inhabitants of the affluent suburbs, austerity did not necessarily mean having to do without. Both external publicity and examples of internal staff training materials make it clear that the message to be conveyed to customers was that they could, and should, consume. This positive attitude is consistently demonstrated across the store's activities from 1947 onwards, and must have been a particularly powerful message to deliver after seven difficult years of war and shortages.

Figure 121:

Singer-Butterick dressmaking show, 1948. Bentalls Archive.

Although Bentalls was not exempt from the difficulties of stock shortages, its success at achieving high sales in spite of them was the result of a recognition that fashionable

[176] The Pimms-sponsored womenswear window of June 1949 featured female mannequins lounging in a suburban garden setting under sun umbrellas, clearly referencing the luxury of space afforded by suburban dwellings. Unlabeled photograph album. Bentalls Archive.

aspiration could be inclusive, rather than exclusive. Instead of dwelling on the difficulty of obtaining the latest ready-to-wear styles, Bentalls demonstrated how new trends could be adopted by a variety of budgets by mixing low-cost ready-to-wear staples with homemade or altered garments.[177]

Bentalls also provided a sense of accessibility to a range of customers by collapsing some of the traditional distinctions between staff and shoppers in order to further impress that the store was embedded in the local community. Bentalls's fashion staff were presented as knowledgeable and professional, but also friendly and reassuringly middle class. In 1947, Bentalls produced a photo story entitled 'A day in the life of a shop girl' (figure 122), which depicted this ideal staff member. Most likely intended for use in staff recruitment, this carefully staged narrative follows the daily routine of an attractive and smartly dressed young female shop assistant from the fashion department, from clocking-in in the morning to eating lunch in the staff canteen. It presents a clear message that successfully selling clothes to Bentalls customers required blurring the boundary between staff member and middle-class fashionable consumer.[178] The shop girl is portrayed as highly visible on the shop floor, whether dressing display mannequins or attentively responding to customer requests. This sense that the customer could relate to the shop girl as 'one of their own' is compounded by images of the woman enjoying Bentalls's staff leisure facilities—playing tennis and having her hair done in the store salon.

Bentalls's photo story demonstrates the 'crisis in salesmanship' of the late 1940s, during which time retailers struggled to maintain customer loyalty in the face of a return to open retail competition post-war.[179] Good service was seen as the means by which to secure customer loyalty, and salespeople were encouraged to sell their personality alongside merchandise.[180] As self-service grew and sales staff

[177] Bentalls was proud to advertise tie-ins with the mid-market publication *Women's Weekly* and drew large crowds for both their much publicised Moygashal fashion advice bureau (run in conjunction with McCalls patterns) and their dressmaking show, sponsored by Singer and Butterick patterns, where home sewing was afforded the same status as the store's seasonal fashion shows. Photograph of Moygashal fashion advice bureau, 1950. Bentalls Archive; Photograph of Singer/Butterick dressmaking show, September 1951. Bentalls Archive.
[178] The efforts made by Bentalls to emphasise the good, middle class tastes of their staff indicates that the Bentalls customer who criticised working-class tastes as 'vulgar' in her Mass Observation diary was not alone in her feelings on this subject. Diary for 12 November 1948. Mass Observation, Diarist 5474.
[179] Cushman, 'The Customer is Always Right', 185.
[180] 'Selling through appearance'. *Harrodian Gazette*, September-October 1951.

Figure 122 (a-f):

'A day in the life of a shopgirl'. Bentalls Archive.

increasingly acted as extensions to departmental visual merchandising, it became increasingly important for Bentalls to encourage staff to feel positive towards the store's fashion offerings. Management encouraged staff to be keen fashion consumers like their clients, and staff were instructed in new styles by means of special fashion shows, featuring clothing selections that were designed to both educate staff in the latest looks and to give them confidence in their own fashionable knowledge and opinions.[181] Fashion features in *Bentalls Staff News Bulletin* are starkly different to those in other corporate publications, such as Marks and Spencer's instructional and didactic staff magazine. Rather than providing accepted information on new styles from fashion experts, the features in *Bentalls Staff News Bulletin* encourage debate and individual views on fashion, promoting the importance of personal style and the pleasures of shopping for clothes.[182]

Bentalls staff were not just given opportunities to talk about fashion, they were also invited to share in the pleasures of fashionable consumption. Staff perks included opportunities to buy garments from new shipments before they were made available to customers. Bentalls recognised that it was just as important to cultivate the same sense of powerful, fashionable agency in staff members as it was in customers, and deemed the benefits so great that the store continued to offer staff fashionable perks even at times when stock was limited and the items were in high demand, for example giving staff first refusal over rare post-war deliveries of swim suits in synthetic fabrics.[183]

Nowhere was the blurring of boundaries between staff and consumer more apparent than in the Junior Miss Department. Bentalls used promotional events to create close relationships between the Junior Miss department's stock, its staff and its customers with the aim of cultivating customer loyalty. The wide range of promotional activities connected to the Junior Miss department were designed not only to attract young women into the store, but to position the store as a place where they could learn to create a fashionable identity that was inextricably linked to Bentalls. The department aimed to position itself as a source of fashionable information akin to that of a film magazine or a knowledgeable friend, encouraging customers to turn to the

[181] *Bentalls Staff News Bulletin*, September 1947. Bentalls Archive.
[182] *Bentalls Staff News Bulletin* folder, 1946-1949. Bentalls Archive.
[183] *Bentalls Staff News Bulletin*, May 1947. Bentalls Archive.

department for inspiration rather than instructions. Promotional activities were key to achieving this, with a focus on encouraging customers to interact with staff members as if they were their peers, as can be seen in figure 123, an image of the 'Junior Miss Tent' at Bentalls's popular annual Film Garden Party event in July 1948. Towards the bottom left of the image there are two young women engaged in conversation. One is a staff member, wearing a fashionable new striped summer dress, which would have been selected from the department's current stock, and the other is a customer. Although the customer is wearing a much less fashionable dark coat—quite possibly a piece of school uniform—the way her hair is tied with large, decorative ribbons strongly indicates an interest in experimenting with fashionable styles. The image shows the staff member handing the customer a leaflet, but more importantly, engaging her in friendly two-way conversation. It was this level of approachability and individual attention that allowed staff at that year's Film Garden Party to collect 700 names and addresses to add to the Junior Miss mailing list.

Figure 123:
Miss Junior tent at Bentalls's Film Garden Party, 1947. Bentalls Archive.

Single events such as the Film Garden Party proved so successful that the department launched the 'Miss Junior Saturday Club' in March 1949. The Saturday Club was highly popular with local teens. There were 200 people in attendance at its inaugural

meeting in the store with a further 3500 on its mailing list. The Saturday Club ran along the lines of a community-based youth club, providing free talks and workshops for its members. It advertised itself as a space for socialising and fun, not for selling clothes, but it had a clear agenda to encourage sales by promoting fashionable aspiration amongst its members. It achieved this by offering suburban teens glimpses of lives beyond their home and school experiences, hiring speakers including actresses to give talks on themes such as 'the American teenager and her way of life'.[184] Crucially, it also promised that its members could achieve, through association with Bentalls, the kind of glamour and romance they saw at club events.

The Saturday Club actively invited members to participate in a range of events, such as beauty contests, with a clear message that the Bentalls Junior Miss did not just emulate fashion—she embodied it.[185] Like its womenswear counterpart, the Junior Miss Department staged fashion shows in the Wolsey Suite. However, these were marketed in a very different way. Publicity proclaimed that these shows were produced for local teenage consumers by local teenage consumers, for although the stock shown was selected by staff, the live mannequins were all members of the Miss Junior Saturday Club. In 1949, British Pathé captured the first of these shows in a newsreel entitled 'Schoolgirl mannequin'.[186] The show featured a specially constructed set with an outdoors theme, including a catwalk covered in fake grass and a large milestone-shaped prop with '14 miles to London' painted on it, simultaneously highlighting Kingston's proximity to and distance from the city centre (figure 124). In the background, a school badge-shaped sign reading 'Young teens parade' emphasised the theme of the show: freedom from uniforms during the school holidays.

The fashions on show represented a version of the latest American styles, however designed and presented here with affluent suburban London summer holidays in mind. For example, American style two-piece beach outfits were followed by a girl wearing jodhpurs and clutching a riding crop, an outfit for the 'girl with a pony'. Live mannequins of various ages were used, although the older teens were given more revealing clothes and props such as bicycles that hinted at the greater freedom to

[184] *Bentalls Staff News Bulletin*, March 1949. Bentalls Archive.
[185] *Bentalls Staff News Bulletin*, July 1948. Bentalls Archive.
[186] *Schoolgirl Mannequins*, British Pathé, 1949.

escape family life that came with age. Of course, in the family-friendly spirit of the Miss Junior club, the show suggested that sunbathing was the best use a teen could make of such freedom. The audience demographic clearly mirrored the girls on the catwalk. Aside from a few mothers and fairly bored-looking younger brothers, the audience was filled with attentive teenage girls taking the event extremely seriously. Many have clearly styled their hair and worn their most fashionable outfits, although these are often concealed beneath old, dark school coats. Providing an accurate representation of the school-age audience in the live mannequins placed the audience and models on a more equal footing. This would have had the effect of elevating the status of the judgements and tastes of audience members, inviting them to discuss and participate in the formation of local youth fashion, rather than wait as passive recipients of new trends.

Figure 124:
Still from Saturday Club fashion show. *Schoolgirl Mannequins*, British Pathé, 1949.

Bentalls further built on the success of the Saturday Club meetings by producing a newsletter entitled *News for Miss Junior*.[187] This publication had a similar tone to the Hollywood fan magazines of the period. It treated the reader as a friend by addressing her in a casual, conversational manner. Although produced to promote the department, the newsletter was more than just a sales catalogue; it featured recipe ideas as well as information on new music, books and local theatre productions—and

[187] *News for Miss Junior* newsletter, Spring 1950. Bentalls Archive.

"RECIPE FOR SPRING"

All the ingredients for Miss Junior's Spring wardrobe shown in your very own Fashion Parades.

FRIDAY 3rd MARCH at 4.30 and 6 p.m.

SATURDAY 4th MARCH at 11 a.m.* and 2.45 p.m.

*Saturday Club Members only.

Gone are the days when teenagers had to dress as best they could in clothes that just happened to fit—Now their Fashions are especially designed to suit their youthful figures, personalities and purses—and they even have their own Fashion Parades!

So make a date, Miss Junior, to see the lovely Spring wardrobe we have planned for you. Our "Recipe" for this exciting season of the year includes just everything—from outfits for the office, casuals for weekends, and those "special" dresses for dancing and fun time.

To get your tickets (they are free, of course) write to:

The Editress,
News for Miss Junior,
Bentalls Limited,
Kingston-on-Thames,

and give full details of the day and time you want to come and how many tickets you require. They will go quickly so don't delay, do it NOW!

* Admittance to the Parade on Saturday at 11 a.m. will be by Membership card only—as Saturday Club members need NOT apply for tickets.

Have fun in the kitchen and surprise the family.

Try two new recipes—we bullied them out of our Chef!

FRIAR'S OMELETTE

1½ lb. Apples.
3 oz. Sugar.
1 gill Water.
1½ ozs. Butter or Margarine.
½ pt. Breadcrumbs.
A few brown Breadcrumbs.

Peel and core the apples, cut them up and put them in a stewpan with sugar and water. Let them stew until quite soft, then add the butter. Butter a pie dish, sprinkle breadcrumbs all over it, fill with alternate layers of apple and breadcrumbs, sprinkle top with brown breadcrumbs and bake in a hot oven for about 10 minutes. When done turn out on to a hot dish, sprinkle with castor sugar and serve hot. Sufficient for 4 persons.

FIG COOKIES

½ lb. Butter or Margarine.
½ lb. Sugar.
2 Eggs, or Dried Eggs.
½ lb. Flour.
2 oz. Figs.
1 Teaspoonful Baking Powder.

Cream butter and sugar together, beat in the eggs, one at a time, chop figs finely and stir into the butter and eggs. Sieve the flour and baking powder together mix them into the butter and eggs adding more flour if necessary to make it into a stiff dough. Roll out thinly, cut into rounds and bake in a moderate oven for about 20 minutes.

AND TALKING OF AMATEUR COOKS—

we made the girl friends take their aprons off to show their "at home" casuals.

The "Mrs. Beeton" on the left has trim navy wool slacks and a linen blouse with tucking at the yoke. The slacks 24", 26" waist, **22s. 9d.** The blouse in jade Green or Blue, **22s. 9d.** It is just one style chosen from the blouses in the Junior Miss Shop.

Marianne's Grey flannel skirt is an indispensable, she says—and we agree. With two big patch pockets and slightly flared. Waist sizes 24", 26". **30s. 9d.**

Figure 125:

News for Miss Junior newsletter, Spring 1950. Bentalls Archive.

noted that the featured records, books and theatre tickets could all be purchased at Bentalls. Most of the selling in the newsletter would have been done subtly through the photographs used to illustrate the recipes and editorials. These featured pairs of models posed in narrative scenes, for example engaged in the act of visiting a friend or cooking together, while wearing clothes from the department (figure 125). The photographs were accompanied by details about the price and size of the garments, akin to an advert or catalogue entry, but also by direct captioned interactive questions that encouraged the reader to respond and feel like they were invited to join the party. These captions also encouraged a sense of fashionable confidence in the reader by inviting her to contribute opinions by asking leading questions such as 'don't you love her American sailor jacket?'[188]

[188] *News for Miss Junior* newsletter, Spring 1950. Bentalls Archive.

The conspiratorial tone of the newsletter indicates that Bentalls had successfully used promotional events and marketing to blur the distinction between the store and the individual fashionable identities of its customers in order to position itself as the arbiter of local taste. Bentalls were subtle in masking the way their buyers edited fashions on behalf of customers by staging promotional activities that promised consumer choice. The store created a visually coherent retail environment, to the extent that it is often difficult to distinguish between staff members and older attending customers in images of Miss Junior events, as staff members were dressed in the stock customers were encouraged to buy, and, in turn, customers were encouraged to both emulate these looks and see themselves as a part of the department and its workings. Although Bentalls's Junior Miss department had been joined by numerous other teenage fashion departments across London department stores by the end of the decade, its local focus and attention to accessibility seem to have made it uniquely successful in building a lifestyle brand around the inexpensive ready-to-wear clothes the department offered for sale.

Suburban success at a time of austerity

The multiple appeals of heritage, cosmopolitan fashion and a convenient location that were promoted through publicity and events proved a major draw for Bentalls. According to several Mass Observation diarists in the late 1940s, Bentalls was more crowded than major West End department stores, indicating that the suburban store was thriving, possibly even at the expense of its inner city counterparts.[189] In fact, the commercial success of Bentalls in the last years of the 1940s is noticeably different from many central London department stores, who struggled to regain pre-war sales figures for fashionable goods.[190] In contrast, Bentalls celebrated 1947 as a year of record turnover, and continued to see excellent growth in its fashion departments well into the 1950s.[191]

[189] Bentalls was described by one diarist as a 'seething mass of people' on Saturdays. Diary for 1 December 1948. Mass Observation, Diarist 5474; Diary for 13 December 1945. Mass Observation, Diarist 5098.
[190] See sales figures showing 'slump' in London stores. *John Lewis Gazette,* 14 August 1948. John Lewis Archive, 194/a.
[191] *Bentalls Staff News Bulletin*, January 1948, 1. Bentalls Archive.

Further, it seems that Bentalls capitalised on its position as a suburban store in order to achieve this growth, appealing to the anti-austerity mood of many local consumers in the relatively affluent boroughs that surrounded it with promotions that emphasised the accessibility of new fashions and their leisured enjoyment. This positive, austerity-defying attitude can clearly be seen in showy visits from Hollywood stars and grand store-wide campaigns, such as one titled 'We Believe in England' in September 1947, which promoted British goods without labelling them as export-only.[192] But this approach is also present in smaller and quieter promotions that appealed to more accessible aspirations, including demonstrations of new labour-saving washing machines.[193] This mixture of domesticity and glamour reflects the store's ability to straddle the fashionable buzz of the city with suburban tastes in a way that reassured customers that local style was not inferior or less fashion-aware than its urban counterpart.

The suburban tastes of Bentalls's customers also influenced the wider networks of London fashion. The store's fashion buyers were vocal in their views on the shortcomings of the city's fashion industry, and even petitioned the LMHG to amend the dates of its fashion shows, arguing that they could not meet consumer demand if fashion designers showed new season garments to great publicity months before they were able to stock the goods in store, something that undermined Bentalls's carefully constructed position as a purveyor of the latest fashions.[194] The local influence of Bentalls's fashion buyers demonstrates that post-war fashion was not simply dictated by a narrow group of designers, but that the pace and manner in which emerging styles were adopted varied from place to place, suiting local tastes and lifestyles. Alongside merchandising innovations and new departments, it was this understanding of local fashion practices that allowed Bentalls to grow alongside the rapidly spreading south west suburbs it served.

[192] Unlabeled press clippings album. Bentalls Archive; photograph of Goldwyn Girls visit, 1946. Bentalls Archive.
[193] Photograph of Bendix washing machine demonstration in electrical department, January 1951. Bentalls Archive.
[194] Unlabeled press clippings album. Bentalls Archive.

Make do and spend: balancing retailers' optimism against consumer experiences

In 1949, *Display* ran an editorial celebrating the relaxing of rules on electric lighting for shop exteriors. It described how this regulatory change had enabled Oxford Street to turn on its Christmas lights for the first time since 1938, casting a red-and-green coloured glow which the publication saw as a promise that, after a long and difficult decade, the 1950s would be a little brighter for both retailers and customers.[195] Certainly it had been a challenging few years for London retailers but, as this chapter has demonstrated, it was also a time of great innovation in a variety of retail methodologies. Retailers adapted to new types of ready-to-wear merchandise by creating a more inclusive and accessible type of fashionable spectacle. Austerity conditions supported retailers' decisions to modernise as, for many department stores, the excitement of new displays and modern interior design acted in lieu of extensive stock selections, enabling them to offer customers the promise of a brighter fashion future in spite of the persisting problems of austerity.

The increasingly coherent aesthetic and broader marketing strategies developed to promote fashions during the latter half of the 1940s strengthened London's national and international reputation as a place to consume the latest trends and laid the foundations that would enable this reputation to weather the declining fortunes of London's garment manufacturing industry in subsequent decades. Comparing the promotional activities of stores across different parts of the city highlights that, as bespoke and made-to-measure fashion manufacturing in London declined, the meaning of 'London fashion' became increasingly fluid. Bentalls's post-war success demonstrates how parts of London that were previously excluded from a tight definition of London fashion were able to capitalise on the changing landscape by creating narratives that positioned them at the centre of the fashion city. But these new stories of London fashion often left increasingly large gaps between the aspirational narratives told about the fashion city and the day-to-day fashionable experiences of Londoners. When faced with the dynamic images of Liberty's window displays or the smiling Bentalls shop girl, arms laden with boxes of stockings, it can be easy for us to forget the real frustrations of customers faced with the difficulties of

[195] *Display*, December 1949, 13.

austerity consumption because the striking visual narratives of post-war fashion retail successfully mask the hurdles that they were employed to overcome.

Retailers battled against austerity with seemingly relentless optimism. Fashion purchases are often investments that speak of who a consumer would like to be as much as they are made to fulfill a specific need. Retailers targeted this aspirational side of fashion by offering bright colours and playful aesthetics that acted as both a visual tonic for the present and a promise of a brighter post-war future. As one Mass Observer speculated, 'Colour seems to be the order of the day, due, I think, to the depressing times we are going through'.[196] But the rebuilding of London's consumer cultures after the war was not a process that retailers could achieve alone. It was a co-production in which consumers interacted with retailers to shape the stories told about London fashion, and the narratives many Londoners told about their own experiences of fashionable consumption at a time of austerity were a far cry from retailers' promotions.

Diaries written for Mass Observation show us snapshots of these personal stories. The diarists seem largely oblivious to the dynamism of post-war fashion retail, and chose instead to focus on stories of frustrated consumption. Mass Observers were highly critical of bad salesmanship, stock shortages and shabby stores. They frequently complained about the gap between shop advertising that promised fashionable excitement and the reality of what was available to purchase.[197] Shoppers regularly found themselves confronted with the blushes of red-faced sales assistants explaining that the merchandise in the window had sold out in their size.[198] As supplies slowly improved towards the end of the 1940s, rising prices became an increasing obstacle to buying clothes.[199] Numerous Mass Observers cited shock and

[196] 'Clothes buying and wearing', 1947. Mass Observation, FR 2502.
[197] It is interesting to note an overlap between frustration with retailers and interviews with visitors to the *Britain Can Make It* exhibition, which found that one of the most frequent criticisms was that the merchandise displayed was not available to buy, and just looking was not enough to satisfy their consumer cravings. 'Britain Can Make It', 1946. Mass Observation, FR 2441.
[198] Diary for December 1945. Mass Observation, Diarist 5275.
[199] A 1949 survey about attitudes towards clothes buying shows that between June 1948 and January 1949, the number of respondents who credited money shortage as being the primary obstruction to buying new clothes rose from 47 per cent to 73 per cent. Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Austerity in Britain*, 94.

frustration at the high prices commanded by even every-day fashions, and regularly perceived purchase tax as the culprit behind prohibitive costs.

In the face of high prices, many Londoners turned away from department stores to get their fashion fixes. Home dressmaking played a significant role in filling wardrobes, and the numerous adverts that appear on the back pages of publications such as *Vogue* demonstrate that London's individual tailors and dressmakers continued to clothe many of the city's inhabitants.[200] Some established retailers such as Moss Bros. of Regent Street experimented with new business models, expanding their womenswear hire business in order to combat the consumer problems of coupon and cash shortages.[201] The informal clothing economy also played a lively role in austerity consumption. In the immediate post-war years, the black market thrived as the patriotic discourse supporting continued rationing seemed ever-more redundant as war receded into the past.[202] The *Evening Standard* regularly reported on individuals making substantial sums of money from the black market and coupon forgery; and off-coupon stocking sellers at times lined the pavements of Oxford Street two or three deep, causing Selfridges to complain that they obstructed customers trying to enter the store.[203] Additionally, both formal and informal covered and street markets continued to provide an important source of fashion, most famously at Petticoat Lane and East Street Market in Walworth, where Henry Grant photographs from this period show a bustling trade in shoes, stockings and bold print dresses set against a bomb damaged background (figure 126).[204]

Despite the promised dawning of a new era, the depressive effect of austerity consumption lasted beyond the end of clothes rationing in March 1949. While shoppers on the hunt for new clothes were no longer limited by the number of coupons they had left in their wallets, consumption was still controlled to a certain extent by a complex system of price controls. The merchandise itself was not yet free of regulatory influence either, as the Utility scheme, which was subject to purchase

[200] *Vogue,* September 1951, 138-140.
[201] This new service was described in a Pathé newsreel from 1949 as a 'modern solution' to a 'modern problem'. *Dress Hire*, British Pathé, 1949.
[202] Kynaston, *Austerity Britain*, 111.
[203] *Draper's Record*, 19 May 1945, 9.
[204] See Nigel Henderson's photograph *Petticoat Lane Market*, 1952. Tate collection P79308; Henry Grant, Museum of London, HG1395/61 and HG1395/22.

tax exemptions, did not end for clothing until 1952. Although consumer spending on clothing had just about returned to pre-war levels by 1950, this figure fell again between 1951 and 1954, quite possibly as a result of the continuing supply shortage.[205] For all the exciting visual changes to the consumer experience between 1945 and 1951, shoppers were still not able to choose from as a wide a variety of garments as they had in 1938. This gap between the promises made by retail promotions and the contents of the city's wardrobes goes at least some way to explaining why the retail developments of austerity London have largely been forgotten.

Figure 126:

Petticoat Lane Market, 1952. Henry Grant. Museum of London, HG1395/61.

[205] Post-war clothing supplies were in short supply—they had only recovered three-quarters of their pre-war levels by 1949. Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Austerity in Britain*, 11, 56.

Archival encounter no. 6:

2010.3/1a: Brown snakeskin-effect Utility shoes, c.1942-1945. Purchased second-hand for the donor to wear to her wedding

Figure 127:

Brown snakeskin-effect Utility shoes, c.1942-1945. Museum of London, 2010.3/1a.

I am in an open-plan office, scrolling through a list of shoes on Mimsy and cross checking their dry physical descriptions against my notes. One entry makes me pause, leaving the cursor hovering while I read: 'purchased second-hand […] for donor to wear to her wedding'. Historians who write about archival processes and journeys of discovery seem to find their breakthrough moments surrounded by the material stuff of the archive, not when looking at the screen of an electronic database. But although digitised catalogues may not have the same evocative materiality, they can also be places of excitement and revelation. Most importantly, they can make you look again. These snakeskin-effect pumps, made by large-scale shoe manufacturer Steplite, are a fairly unremarkable example of a pair of wartime Utility shoes, featuring the medium heels and built-up soles typical of the period. I had previously encountered them in the archive, but quickly moved on to pay closer attention to something that I deemed more interesting. But Mimsy made me look again, wondering if I could learn more about what these shoes, purchased second-hand on 18 October 1945 by Gladys Sandford, could tell me about the emotional importance of fashion for special occasions during a time of extreme shortages.

These shoes provide an example of the importance of the informal economy in post-war fashion retail. Once the celebratory hangovers had faded and the victory flags were taken down, 1945 ushered in an era of increasing stock shortages and reduced clothing rations. In response to these difficulties, ever increasing numbers of Londoners turned to the second-hand clothing market for their sartorial fixes, since these purchases were not liable for coupons; sales of second-hand clothes peaked in London between 1945 and 1946.[1] Street markets of all kinds—both official and unofficial, and selling a mixture

[1] There was a certain level of confusion about whether second-hand clothes were liable for coupons throughout the 1940s, requiring the President of the Board of Trade to clarify the position in Parliament on multiple occasions. Second-hand clothes sold below a certain price were not liable, but re-made clothes (new clothes refashioned from old garments) were. See Hansard, HC Deb 25 March 1947 vol 435 cc173-4W; HC Deb 18 January 1949 vol 460 c12W. Although street markets in less affluent parts of the city continued to thrive after 1946, by 1947 West End dealers reported that demand for second-hand clothing and `accessories had fallen dramatically as shop stock rose. Mass Observation, Diarist 5250, June 1947.

of both new and second-hand clothes—provided an important source of fashion in post-war London. As Bob Collins's documentary photographs of second-hand clothing piled up in Mile End show, these markets often offered a plethora of choice in comparison to sparsely stocked stores (figure 129).

Although obtained second-hand, these shoes represented an important purchase for the wearer, who bought them specifically for her own wedding. It is this emotional attachment that perhaps explains how a pair of practical shoes with multiple owners has remained in such good condition, with soles and heels exhibiting only minimal signs of wear. These shoes demonstrate that the life cycles of fashionable objects in 1940s London were complex. From the old clothes remade into new outfits, to the multiple meanings bestowed on second-hand clothes by their various owners, austerity challenged people's conceptions of newness in relation to fashion, and highlighted that one person's unwanted garment could be prized by another.

Figure 128:
Utility stamp detail from interior of brown snakeskin-effect Utility shoes, c.1942-1945. Museum of London, 2010.3/1a.

Figure 129:

Shoes at an East End street market, by Bob Collins, 1948. Museum of London, IN37802.

Six:

Watching austerity fashion

Figure 130:

Hue and Cry, scene still with children on a mound of London bomb rubble. Dir. Charles Crichton, Ealing Studios, 1947.

There is something deeply unsettling about the use of bomb rubble in films shot on-location by Ealing Studios in post-war London. Although rarely mentioned in the dialogue, the rubble pervades these otherwise domestic adventure stories and dramas with uncanny reminders of the extent of wartime destruction and captures some of the strangeness of the damaged city. The ruins are particularly visually jarring against the everyday dress of the characters who move through the bomb-damaged streets. The juxtaposition of their ordinary clothes—the likes of which hung in wardrobes throughout the nation—against remnants of extraordinary disruption must have been an unpleasant reminder for the audience of how much of what they once took for granted had been lost and had changed in a short time since these piles of debris were unremarkable brick terraces where ordinary people went about their daily routines.

Bringing together the familiar and the strange blurred the boundary between fact and fiction in these films. It made images of bomb-damaged London look like film sets, created from props placed in front of a painted backdrop, and it made the real bomb sites fertile settings in which to tell fictional stories. Although the post-war austerity years are not usually remembered as an exciting time to narrate London, fictional outputs from the late 1940s city demonstrate a desire to observe and narrate the place and its people with an unusual attention to detail.[1] Novels and films produced in London in the immediate aftermath of the war are populated by characters who have found new—and often fantastical—ways to live, and dress, amongst the ruins.[2] Fictional accounts often used clothes to explain how characters had adapted to life in the changed post-war city because, unlike the business of fashion, which had to continue to rebuild and reinvent itself at a fast pace in order to survive in an increasingly competitive industry, depictions of fashion in fiction provided space to mourn what was lost and what people feared they were going to lose in the changes brought by post-war modernity.

This chapter explores how London fashion was depicted on-screen in the late 1940s through the close study of the materiality of costumes in a selection of films produced

[1] The writings selected by Richard Tames to represent the late 1940s in *London: A Cultural History* present the city as a ghostly blank canvas, ripe for exploration in future decades once it had finished picking up the broken pieces of its past. Tames, *London: A Literary and Cultural History*, 151-152.

[2] See contemporary austerity fiction such as Baron, *Rosie Hogarth*; Bowen, 'The Demon Lover'; Camberton, *Scamp*; Macaulay, *The World My Wilderness*.

by Ealing Studios between 1947 and 1951. Cinema played a particularly important role in the visual culture of post-war Britain dues to its huge popularity; 1946, a year commonly remembered in historical accounts for fuel shortages and the introduction of bread rationing, marked the peak of British cinema attendance, with audience numbers reaching 1,635 million.[3] As a result, the presentation of clothes on-screen in Ealing films would have been a considerable influence on what cinema-goers thought of as London fashion. Moreover, looking at these sources today gives an insight into 1940s views of fashion by revealing which aspects of clothing film producers and directors used to communicate emotions—ranging from desire to disgust—with their audiences.

Reflecting a growing interest in the relationship between fashion, film and consumption, this chapter specifically focuses on how 1940s audiences might have understood the moral, gender and class connotations of fashion in film through their own experiences of making, buying and wearing clothes.[4] Through this it asks how film makers drew on the embodied knowledge of cinema audiences to turn costumes into powerful material expressions of the hopes, fears and frustrations of post-war Londoners and how, in turn, these films shaped the way audiences interpreted their own bodily relationships towards the clothes they wore. This chapter also considers how the material presentation of clothes on-screen contributed to consumption cultures in the city through commercial tie-ins with fashion brands and the fan cultures cultivated by popular film magazines. Finally, it questions the potential role of these fictional accounts in shaping the stories that have subsequently been told about fashion in post-war London and considers how looking closely at the material details of clothes on film can contribute to our understanding of fashion during this time by disrupting the cultural nostalgia with which these films are often associated today.

The presentation and meaning of fashion on-screen has been widely considered by both fashion and film scholars alike. Much has been written by figures such as Stella Bruzzi and Adrienne Munich about the significance of clothes on-screen, particularly

[3] Hennessy, *Never Again*, 276-277; Williams, *Get Me a Murder*, 194.
[4] This interest is illustrated by the launch of the journal of *Film, Fashion & Consumption* in 2012. The inaugural issue argues 'it is vital that the academic analysis of screen costuming moves beyond the film text to consider the wider institutional processes and consumption practices connected to fashion and spectators'. Gilligan, 'Heaving cleavages', 7.

focusing on crossovers between fashion and costume design, and how fashion designers have used the medium of moving pictures to promote their work.[5] The costumes of the fictional films produced by Ealing Studios have also been the subject of considerable study in writings ranging from details about the specific workings of Ealing's wardrobe department to discussions about the symbolic meaning of the costumes shown on-screen.[6] These studies are united by their primary focus on how fashion brands, designers or directors presented clothes on-screen for consumption—they consider the intent of these authorial figures, but not how audiences actually consumed the clothes they saw on-screen.[7] Although some studies of clothes on-screen do consider how the visual presentation of garments as symbols of characters' feelings could trigger emotional responses in audiences, the general focus on the interaction between clothes and on-screen bodies in these publications leaves audiences strangely disembodied.[8] This chapter addresses the way that audiences are overlooked in studies of fashion in film by considering how focusing on the materiality of the clothes on-screen makes us understand costume in a different way, and how this can provide insight into the relationships that people had with their clothes in the past.[9]

Fashion has great agency in works of fiction. It is widely acknowledged in the fields of literature and film studies that clothes provide a powerful means for writers, costume designers and directors to drive plots and convey meaning between characters and audiences.[10] Since the development of the novel in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, readers have learned to interpret dress as representative of a character's personality, and there is a substantial body of academic work dedicated to 'reading' these fictional fashions.[11] But the concern these readings take in analysing the symbolic meanings of clothes within certain social structures and cultural

[5] Bruzzi, *Undressing Cinema*; Munich, *Fashion in Film*; Uhlirova, '100 Years of the Fashion Film'; Berry, *Screen Style*.
[6] Suroweic, 'Anthony Mendleson'; Kirkham, 'Dress, Dance, Dreams, and Desire'.
[7] Due to a lack of evidence for audience responses before mass digital consumption, several writers consider active spectatorship of fashion in film to be a modern phenomenon. See Uhlirova, '100 Years of the Fashion Film', 138; Khan, 'Cutting the Fashion Body'.
[8] Stella Bruzzi's description of the repressive gender roles symbolised by the New Look on-screen provides a particularly compelling insight into the emotional potential of the visual signs of costumes. Bruzzi, 'It will be a magnificent obsession', 178.
[9] The gap in studies of audience responses to costumes has been noted by others studying the subject. See Warner, 'Tracing patterns', 124.
[10] McNeil, Karaminas and Cole, 'Introduction: Fashion in Fiction', 6.
[11] Hughes, *Dressed in Fiction*. See also Nicklas, 'Incomparable Clothes and Shingled Hair'.

understandings often comes at the expense of considering how fictional fashions also communicate meaning through their materiality. Analyses of fashion in novels and films largely overlook how clothes can convey material and bodily understandings between writer and audience in a way that can be both deeply moving and personally affecting. They forget that while a pair of gloveless hands in a church may well represent a sense of a character's weakened morality, it might equally convey the discomfort of having cold fingers.[12]

Much of this narrow focus can be traced to the influence of Roland Barthes, and particularly his work *The Fashion System*, in which he strictly separates material clothes from the language of fashion and extols the ability of written fashion to convey meaning over and above 'actual' fashion.[13] Barthes's work has shaped academic thinking about the ways in which fictional fashions reveal both the self and its relation to the social, and this has resulted in highly representational understandings of what fictional clothes mean.[14] Instead, this chapter takes a more-than-representational turn. As discussed in chapter two of this thesis, this more-than-representational methodology brings together representational sources with contextual information about sensory experiences of fashion in order to explore and speculate on how the materiality of costumes in post-war film might have resonated with London audiences by evoking the sensory connections and emotions they associated with different types of clothing at a time of austerity.[15] Although there is a lack of in-depth evidence about audience reactions to these on-screen garments, the intimate nature of the relationship between clothes and the body means that looking closely at the way the materiality of fashion is featured on-screen can give us clues about how Londoners understood the look, feel and even the smell of clothes at this time of social upheaval.[16]

[12] This project's methodology for considering the bodily understanding of audience response to costumes is also informed by literary Reader Response theory, which considers that while an author's intent cannot be fully recovered from a text, the reader's experience of authorial meaning can provide a rich source for analysis. Eagleton, *Literary Theory,* 66-67.
[13] Barthes, *The Fashion System*, 4-5. See also Elizabeth Wilson's criticisms of Barthes in Wilson, 'Fashion in Fiction', 545-548.
[14] Hughes, 'Dressing for Success', 11.
[15] Lorimer, 'The Busyness of Being "More-than-Representational"', 83–94.
[16] Stallybrass, 'Worn Worlds'.

The approach taken in this chapter further develops existing work that considers how the spectacle of clothes on-screen visually affects the audience, beyond merely signifying characterisation.[17] It particularly draws on Giuliana Bruno's writing, which calls for us to think differently about materiality. Bruno is interested in how materiality manifests on the surface of different media and how the physicality of material objects can be translated into other mediums, such as photography and film.[18] If, as Bruno discusses, 'materiality is not a question of materials but, fundamentally, of activating material relations', it follows that the ready-to-wear clothes shown on-screen in Ealing Studios productions provide a connection to the lost materialities of those garments, and through this, clues to the embodied and imaginative responses that 1940s audiences had to these costumes.[19] This methodology offers a way of understanding how people thought about the every-day materiality of London fashion and austerity in a more spontaneous and less filtered way than sources such as Mass Observation diaries, where contributors consciously recorded their thoughts for posterity.

The films discussed in this chapter are all London stories, produced by Ealing Studios and primarily shot on location in the city. Ealing Studios had been in operation since 1931 and became well-respected for their innovative documentaries during the Second World War, but it was in the immediate post-war years that the studio produced a series of comedy films that made their international reputation. The centrality of these films to contemporary understandings of what life in austerity London looked like is evident from the numerous publications that consider their aesthetics.[20] Existing studies of these films tend to highlight the reality of their presentation of everyday life.[21] They describe how Ealing's comedy was not intended as an escape from reality, but to provide a gently anarchic outlet to relieve the grievances of the general public.[22] Most of all, they understand the aesthetics of these films as representations shaped by the social and cultural values of the era.[23] What is less often considered in detail is how these films constructed and challenged London audiences' understanding of the social and cultural meaning of fashion at a time of

[17] Uhlirova, 'Introduction', 19-26.
[18] Bruno, *Surface*, 2-7.
[19] Ibid., 8.
[20] Brunsdon, *London in Cinema*; Duguid et al., *Ealing Revisited*; Shonfield, *Walls Have Feelings*.
[21] Barr, *Ealing Studios*; Murphy, *Realism and Tinsel.*
[22] Muir, *Studying Ealing Studios*; Sinclair, *War Like a Wasp*.
[23] Boyce, *The Lasting Influence of the War on Postwar British Film*; O'Sullivan, 'Ealing comedies 1947-57'.

austerity, and continue to do so to this day.[24] The enduring popularity of these films, from their original releases to present day screenings and DVD sales, makes Ealing's output an excellent source for looking again at austerity fashion on-screen to consider how London audiences saw themselves represented in the cinema.

Ealing Studios shot eight films against the backdrop of London's bomb-damaged streets and buildings between 1947 and 1951. This chapter discusses five of these, each of which explores a different aspect of what it was like to live and work in the city at a time of austerity, in settings as varied as a glamourous suburban dance hall and a crime-infested, bombed-out East London warehouse. The first of Ealing's comedy films, *Hue and Cry*, was released in 1947 and told the story of a gang of semi-feral working class London children who managed to foil a high-level criminal organisation. Following the unexpected success of *Hue and Cry*, Ealing focused on making more comedy films that celebrated the particular quirks of life in post-war Britain.[25] *Passport to Pimlico* was subsequently released in 1949, telling the story of a London neighbourhood so sick of rationing and austerity that it declared independence from Britain, followed by *The Lavender Hill Mob* in 1951, which narrates the tale of how an ordinary bank clerk from Battersea pulled off an extraordinary gold heist. This chapter also discuss two films not usually considered alongside Ealing's comedy output: the dramas *It Always Rains on Sunday* (1947), about a Bethnal Green housewife who helps her escaped convict ex-lover evade the law, and *Dance Hall* (1950), a lighter piece following the romantic entanglements of four female factory workers who spend their free time frequenting their local Palais de Danse in Chiswick.

The stories might be fantastical, but these films are rooted in the details of specific London neighbourhoods. In order to capture the specifics of different places in the city, the films drew on the lessons Ealing's cameramen learned while making wartime

[24] 1940s reviews of Ealing Studios productions commonly praise the 'realistic' depictions of London shown in these films. See reviews for *Hue and Cry* and *It Always Rains on Sunday* in *Picturegoer*, 7 June 1947, 12; 3 January 1948, 10. Evidence suggests that British films such as these were highly popular with London audiences as a result of this realism. Mayer, *British Cinemas and their Audiences*, 265. It is likely that London audiences were especially interested in films shot in familiar locations in the city, as suggested by the particular success *It Always Rains on Sunday* achieved in the East End and South East-Essex (where numerous East End residents relocated as a result of the war). Brunsdon, *London in Cinema,* 167.

[25] Murphy, *Realism and Tinsel*, 209.

documentaries, and as a result they manage to capture the eeriness of bombsites and bustle of street markets with equal realism.[26] Costumes played an important role in creating this realistic visual, and the wardrobe department took great pains to ensure the clothes on-screen were representative of what was available to buy in the city. The majority of contemporary costumes for female characters were items of ready-to-wear sourced from London shops. Ealing's costume designer, Anthony Mendleson, would supply a costume list to the Board of Trade and receive a corresponding supply of clothing coupons in order to purchase these garments.[27] This made sourcing last-minute additions or replacement costumes problematic—particularly during 1947 when factories were closed due to the winter fuel crisis and supplies were severely disrupted—and actors were encouraged to treat their costumes with care because the clothes were embedded in these austerity consumption processes.[28]

Costumes for use on-stage or screen are generally considered as separate and different to the creations of fashion designers, but this method of sourcing clothes blurs this distinction between the materialities of clothes on- and off-screen.[29] Many London audience members were familiar with the materiality of the clothes they saw on-screen because they frequented the same shops and owned garments by the same brands featured in the films. Yet the close-up shots of these garments on large cinema screens would have also confronted them with a strangely hyper-real view of these familiar clothes, prompting them to look again. The uncanny nature of this shared understanding between audiences and clothes on-screen made the costumes particularly effective tools for evoking sensory memories and emotions in audience members, and allows this chapter to consider the complexities of how the on-screen materiality of a garment's weight, smell and marks of wear might have been understood by 1940s London audiences in multiple ways.[30] Although the first part of this study of clothes on-screen explores how the materiality of costumes could evoke positive emotional associations, embodying notions of resistance and post-war optimism and aspiration, the second part looks again at the darker material memories conjured in these films and finds that the same costumes might also have

[26] Roberts, 'The People's War', 68.
[27] Suroweic, 'Anthony Mendleson', 113.
[28] Ibid., 115.
[29] Stutesman, 'Costume Design', 20.
[30] In the absence of any substantial record of audience responses, considering embodied material understanding is also a way for this chapter to consider audience reactions to film costumes.

communicated narratives of fear for an uncertain future, and frustration at the inability of the post-war Labour government to deliver substantial social change. The ability of costumes to simultaneously elicit these multiple and sometimes contradictory emotions gives an important insight into the way Londoners used fashion as a tool to negotiate their austerity experiences and their understanding of the relationship between fashion, austerity and the city.

The stuff of optimism, aspiration and resistance

The Second World War is often credited with loosening London's social hierarchies and giving Londoners greater opportunities and more freedom to choose how they lived their lives.[31] Certainly, transformations to the physical landscape gave many able-bodied Londoners greater freedom to explore the previously private spaces of the city. The war muddled traditional ideas of property ownership; gangs of children made dens in bombed-out factories, squatting was rife and there are many stories of makeshift camps being erected on bombsites.[32] Ealing's production crews similarly benefited from their freedom to film on bombsites without needing to seek any official permissions or licenses—their extensive use of location filming often feels like a celebration of the city and Londoners' sense of belonging within it.[33] However, Ealing's post-war films also explore the boundaries to London's new social freedoms and the changing meaning of class at this time, and they use the materiality of costume as a key way of communicating these ideas.

Hue and Cry, the first 'Ealing comedy' release in 1947, used the materiality of worn clothing to express an optimistic view of the power of Londoners to topple unfair and corrupt social hierarchies by working cooperatively together. The film tells the story of a group of working class youths who discover that criminal networks have been sending coded messages using the pages of a childrens comic. In spite of widespread police corruption and incompetence, the children eventually manage to foil the criminal gang in a hopeful narrative of honesty and integrity triumphing over the vested interests of a powerful social elite.

[31] Porter, *London: A Social History*, 418.
[32] Kynaston, *Austerity Britain*, 122.
[33] Film crews were only required to notify the police of where they were shooting in 1940s London, not to seek permissions. Sellers, *The Secret Life of Ealing Studios*, 136.

The extent of the struggle the children face to bring down a criminal network embedded in London's social and cultural establishment is reinforced through costume. The child-heroes of the film are clothed in distinctly shabby attire. Dressed in the working class uniform of hand-me-down suit jackets and ties, this motley pack of children appears with various rips in their ill-fitting clothes. This provides an obvious visual comparison with the criminal elements in the film, who are not only neatly dressed in newer clothes, but are fashionable in a way that seems out-of-place and notably ostentatious amid this ruined setting.

Figure 131:
Hue and Cry, scene still showing criminal element Rhona (far right) in bus queue, Ealing Studios, 1947.

In figure 131 from a scene towards the start the film, Rhona—a criminal—can be seen waiting in a bus queue with some of the children. From her crisp turban to her well-heeled shoes, she is the model of contemporary high fashion, with an aesthetic that nods unabashedly and unpatriotically towards Paris rather than home-grown fashion trends. This clear visual difference between Rhona and the other Londoners depicted in these street scenes demands the viewer consider why Rhona can afford to look so different from everyone else under shared austerity conditions, implying that these fashions could only be obtained through the proceeds of criminal greed. Beyond stylistic references, however, it is the material differences between how the criminals

and the children wear their clothes that really casts suspicion on these characters and their self-interested motivations. In contrast to the children she stands with, Rhona's clothes look jarringly new. This is less to do with their style, and more the result of visual clues that indicate the difference between new and well-worn garments. For example, the shoulders of Rhona's jacket are smooth whereas the children's are dented where the shoulder padding has broken down and shifted as a result of a long period of wear. Similarly, the children's jackets show puckering on the quarters below the lapels, a product of shrinkage during washing that would be familiar to members of the audience at this time. Furthermore, Rhona's shiny open-toed heels contrast with the scuffed and stretched leather of the children's shoes, and her fine, sheer stockings stand out against the folds of their coarse wool socks.

Hue and Cry's costumes used its audience's shared understanding of how clothes wear to subvert certain middle-class cultural assumptions and challenge the audience to reconsider their own prejudiced associations between being well-dressed and being respectable. The materiality of the worn costumes worked against the underlying prejudices many Londoner's felt about the clothes of the working classes, the shabbiness of which they interpreted as signs of vulgar and inferior tastes.[34] Conversely, *Hue and Cry* used dirty, shabby clothes to signify the eminently respectable characteristics of integrity and hard work. The central hero, a boy named Joe Kirby, is frequently shot in close-ups that clearly show the dark dirt marks around his cuffs (figure 132). This dirt is gathered from his laborious work at Covent Garden Market as well as from the time he spends hanging out with the gang on dusty bomb sites, and it roots him within the landscape he lives in.[35] In contrast, Rhona is shown in a variety of bright white shirts that remain crisp and unsullied by the dusty realities of post-war London. The cleanliness of her clothing distances her from the day-to-day struggles of many ordinary Londoners—including the film's audience members—who would have been familiar with the difficulties of keeping white garments looking fresh in the dirty city.

[34] One Mass Observation diarist described working-class dress as 'unmistakably vulgar in colour and design'. Diary for 12 November 1948. Mass Observation, Diarist 5474.
[35] London's bombsites really were colonised by children as adventure playgrounds during the period between salvage and rebuilding. Mellor, *Reading the ruins*, 183.

Figure 132:
Hue and Cry, scene still showing Joe Kirby's dirty cuffs. Dir. Charles Crichton, Ealing Studios, 1947.

In appealing to their material understanding of what it was like to wear clothes in the post-war city, the film subtly yet powerfully asked viewers to reconsider their assumptions about which members of society they believed were most likely to make up the criminal class. The film's concern with taking control of the city back from criminal elements would have resonated with an audience used to reading about a perceived crime wave and large numbers of petty burglaries in their newspapers.[36] *Hue and Cry* challenged the moral panic contained in the media reports that blamed this crime wave on the real gangs of youths who played on bombsites—the result, according to newspaper columnist Molly Panter Downes, of wartime family breakdowns and lack of disciplining father figures.[37] Rather than pointing fingers at these semi-feral children, the film harnessed these stereotypes within the story, playing off the understood material meanings of worn clothing to expose the hypocrisy of British society's tendency to turn a blind eye to the criminal behavior of established members of the community simply because they look respectable.

Instead, *Hue and Cry* used neat, new clothes to indicate an association between fashionable excess, self-interest and morally dubious behavior in a way that echoed

[36] 1946 was a particularly bad year for burglary rates in London. Hennessy, *Never Again*, 445.
[37] Kynaston, *Austerity Britain*, 113.

the government's official austerity narrative, which associated material self-sacrifice with patriotism and concern for the greater good. Close-ups of luxurious pieces of clothing on-screen invited the audience to test themselves according to this morality by contrasting materially attractive objects against the shabby costumes of the heroic youths. When Joe Kirby pries open a box of oranges to reveal a stolen fur coat, the camera emphasises its plush depth in the way the light reflects off the coat's long hairs. This visual presentation of the coat's material properties unabashedly reminded the audience of the soft, smooth feel of this object, evoking emotions of desire that are abruptly disrupted by the insertion of Joe's unwashed, rough tweed jacket into the shot. Similarly, when the children foil an attempted hit on Riches (an aptly named fictional department store on Oxford Circus), the drama plays out in front of a fashion display that is stocked full of expensive evening dresses. The way the dresses are lit conveys a tactile sense of the luxury of these garments, accentuating the drape, weight and sheen of expensive fabrics against the clean marble floors of the store. As the camera closes in on one particularly dramatic full-length dress in silk satin, the visual pleasure of the shot is disrupted by a mouse escaping from underneath its voluminous skirt, swiftly followed by a grubby child's hand and a shabby jacket sleeve (figure 133). The lack of regard this scruffy child shows for the luxury of the dress's fabric as he roughly pushes it aside chides audience members who failed the test, and were distracted from the higher-order business of the film's plot by the visual pleasures of material goods.

The use of worn clothing in *Hue and Cry* openly challenged the idea that austerity regulations meant an equality of material sacrifice, showing that money could buy one's way out of austerity. The contrasts between worn and unworn clothing evoke a raw sense of the material unfairness of persistent class inequalities, which ran counter to the narrative of social reform and a new, fairer, post-war Britain.[38] But the film also used worn clothes to express hope that real change was achievable. *Hue and Cry*'s young characters get noticeably shabbier as the film progresses, inviting viewers to see integrity and honesty in the rips and tears of their well-worn garments. Joe Kirby's journey from daydreaming youth to action hero is not marked by a transformation into a well-dressed young man—it is charted in the deteriorating

[38] Hennessy, *Never Again*, 129.

Figure 133:

Hue and Cry, scene still showing children in Riches department store. Dir. Charles Crichton, Ealing Studios, 1947.

materiality of his crudely home-made jumper. Joe's jumper begins the film visibly aged, with a baggy, stretched neckline and darned holes, but it does not begin to physically unravel until he starts to make progress solving the crime. As Joe cracks the first major clue, a large loose thread appears where the knit has been caught on a sharp object. This thread dangles ever longer in each successive scene until it is joined by a second loose thread as the action climaxes (figures 134(a)-(c)). He wears them for the audience like badges, earned for laudable ingenuity, and in this celebration of the material qualities of old, worn clothes, the film invited the audience to think again about the grubby children who colonised the city's bombsites and perhaps find inspiration in their interest in tackling ingrained corruption over concern for their own personal vanity.

Figure 134(a):

Hue and Cry, scene still showing Joe's jumper early in the film. Dir. Charles Crichton, Ealing Studios, 1947.

Figure 134(b):

Hue and Cry, scene still showing Joe's jumper mid-way through the film, with a dangling thread visible. Dir. Charles Crichton, Ealing Studios, 1947.

Figure 134(c):
Hue and Cry, scene still showing Joe's jumper towards the end of the film, with two dangling threads visible. Dir. Charles Crichton, Ealing Studios, 1947.

Hue and Cry's moral message of sartorial self-denial felt increasingly out of touch with the national mood by the time Ealing Studios came to shoot their next comedy film. By 1948, the persistent difficulties of austerity, notably the continuation of rationing and the high cost of living, left many feeling that life in post-war Britain was 'a constant struggle'.[39] Even after Harold Wilson did away with much official regulation between 1948 and 1949, devaluation of the pound meant that the majority of Britons still felt left behind and denied life's material comforts at the end of 1949, nearly five years after the end of the war.[40] Mirroring this rising public frustration with continuing austerity, Ealing films began to introduce heightened moral ambiguity into the way they used costumes to convey individuality and material desires.

In 1949 the studio released *Passport to Pimlico*, a film that offered cinema-goers the tantalising possibility of a return to unbridled consumption in an alternate post-austerity reality.[41] The film's plot centres around the discovery of a royal charter in a

[39] Kynaston, *Austerity Britain*, 296.
[40] Ibid., 353-354.
[41] The opening credits of *Passport to Pimlico* humorously dedicate the film 'to the memory of' ration books—a clever solution to the fact that the government announced the ending of rationing on a number

crater left by the detonation of an unexploded bomb in London's Pimlico area. This charter details that, due to historic land ownership, Pimlico is technically not British, but is in fact legally part of Burgundy. Seizing the opportunity to escape oppressive government regulation, the locals declare themselves independent Burgundians and enjoy the excesses of unrestricted consumption for the first time in years—at least until their supplies run out. Unlike *Hue and Cry*, *Passport to Pimlico* finds hope through a rebellious rejection of austerity rules relating to clothes. By this point in the decade, it had become clear that while austerity might force people to change their clothes-buying habits, its narrative of self-denial had little effect on how they daydreamed about consuming and enjoying fashion. Mass Observation surveys repeatedly suggest that, although rationing encouraged people to buy fewer and better-quality clothes, austerity did not remove the desire to buy, wear and experiment with different fashions.[42] Exciting new clothes were overwhelmingly the item that people most fantasised about obtaining, and *Passport to Pimlico* used the materiality of costume to evoke the power of this consumer desire in its audience.[43]

The consumption of clothing is one of the first signs of the new freedoms enjoyed by Pimlico residents after gaining their independence. Upon hearing the news, the grocery shop assistant Molly (played by Jane Hylton) abandons her shop counter and runs to the local dress shop to retrieve a blouse she wanted to purchase previously but couldn't because she did not have enough coupons (figure 135). Although the act of purchasing an item without coupons is a visually significant symbol of freedom, the film also draws on the ability of clothes on-screen to convey a powerful sensory experience of consumption. It uses the materiality of garments in the shop to evoke sensory memories of the feel of new clothes, which remind the audience of the pleasure and promise of shopping. The clothes Molly rifles through on the shop's rack are made of lightweight patterned cottons, silks and new synthetic materials that move easily through her fingers with a tactile promise they would be accommodatingly comfortable to wear. The materiality of these garments provides a

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of items, including clothing, while the film was in post-production, rendering most of its rationing references immediately historical. Sellers, *The Secret Life of Ealing Studios*, 138.

[42] 'Window shopping (Oxford Street)', 1946. Mass Observation, TC 4-5-D.

[43] The majority of respondents to a survey into attitudes towards clothes buying and wearing in July 1947 expressed a desire to return to a time when they could consume clothes for pleasure, wanting to be able to buy clothes on a 'whim' without worrying whether they were practical or not. 'Clothes buying and wearing', 1947. Mass Observation, FR 2502. See also 'Clothes buying and wearing', 1947. Mass Observation, FR 2502; 'Present Day Cost of Living', 1948. Mass Observation, FR 3075.

stark contrast to Molly's work overalls, which are made of a coarse, heavy cotton, the weight of which is further emphasised by the way the sleeves are rolled up into thick, tight bunches. The fabric of the overalls is aged into a grubby shade of white, and the back is covered in dirty marks from the day's work activities. The juxtaposition of these materials on-screen uses the the implied feel—beyond even the look—of the lightweight shop garments to equate this coupon-free purchase with the promise of an easier and less laborious future.

Figure 135:
Passport to Pimlico, scene still showing Molly wearing dirty overalls in Edie Randall's dress shop. Dir. Henry Cornelius, Ealing Studios, 1949.

The physical weight of women's clothing is important to the plot throughout *Passport to Pimlico*. Audiences familiar with contemporary fashions would have known that the lightweight qualities of the garments worn by the newly-liberated Burgundians indicate that they are mass-produced items of ready-to-wear. These inexpensive clothes, which were unlined and made from cottons and synthetic fabrics, conveyed a material understanding of accessibility because they were affordable—so affordable in fact that, in spite of inflation, it is only rationing that limits the film's characters from buying them.

The material promise of ready-to-wear fashions is most clearly seen in the styling of Shirley Pemberton, played by Barbara Murray. Shirley's outfits become more romantic as the film progresses and she embarks on a love affair with the newly declared Duke of Burgundy, but her clothes still reflect the simple lines of London's ready-to-wear makers rather than the excesses of Parisian couture. This is exemplified by the boldly striped dress she wears one sultry night when dreaming of French vineyards, which is visually striking but still simple in its cut and construction (figure 136). The relatively inexpensive nature of the dress is further emphasised by its lack of internal structuring; it hangs and moves as if it is not lined or boned, and it does not appear to have any shoulder pads. The absence of these features on a highly fashionable item of clothing nod to the democratic possibilities of mass-market fashion. As chapters 2 and 3 of this thesis discuss, London's growing medium-quality ready-to-wear industry sold the egalitarian notion that people from all walks of life should be able to access new fashion trends. Dressing characters in the materiality of London ready-to-wear helped anchor *Passport to Pimlico*'s narrative as a relatable fantasy and suggest that, in a world without purchase tax or controls, British people of all classes might find pride in their ability to look exceptionally stylish.

Figure 136:

Passport to Pimlico, scene still showing the Duke of Burgundy and Shirley Pemberton in stripped dress. Dir. Henry Cornelius, Ealing Studios, 1949.

Passport to Pimlico was not the first time that Ealing's wardrobe department had used costumes to evoke sensory memories suggesting that ready-to-wear fashions offered the possibility of transcending class boundaries. In 1947, Ealing Studios released *It Always Rains on Sunday,* a drama set in a respectable working class household in Bethnal Green that tells the morally ambiguous story of Rose, a housewife forced to decide whether to help her ex-lover, who has escaped from prison, evade recapture by the police. The opening credits of the film proudly advertise that the costumes of the central female characters were provided by the newly-launched and increasingly popular Horrockses Fashions. This lends an exceptionally middle-class look to the younger women in this gritty working class drama that indicates increased opportunities and a certain blurring of class boundaries. Although the film is black-and-white, the bold, contrasting patterns of the Horrockses dresses evoke an implied sense of colour that contrasts with the drab, dark suits worn by the older male characters; further they give these working class women a sense of visual connection to parts of the city beyond their local neighborhood, in particular the exciting West End (figure 137).

Figure 137:

It Always Rains on Sunday, scene still showing Vi and Doris Sandigate in Horrockses dresses. Dir. Rober Hamer, Ealing Studios, 1947.

But the real power of these ready-to-wear garments lies not in their visual cues but in their ability to evoke another sensory experience—the idea of contrasting smells on-screen. As the title suggests, it rains throughout the film. Water marks darken jacket shoulders and upturned collars, wet hats line hooks in the pub and damp jackets are hung in front of fires to dry. The realism of these visual cues remind the audience of their own regular experiences of wet clothes, and particularly of the unpleasant scent of drying old wool coats and jackets as they release a mixture of aged and stale human and animal body odor. The camera angles of the interior shots purposefully highlight the confined, even claustrophobic, nature of these spaces, further emphasising the inclemency of the London weather and the potency of these smells.[44] In contrast, the younger women wear new PVC raincoats over their Horrockses outfits, which conjure memories of an altogether different, and even pleasant set of smells (figure 138). By dressing in new ready-to-wear clothing, it is implied, it was possible to transcend not only the look of the working-class East End, but its baser sensory experiences too.

Figure 138:
It Always Rains on Sunday, scene still showing Vi and Doris Sandigate in Horrockses dresses. Dir. Rober Hamer, Ealing Studios, 1947.

[44] Boyce, *The Lasting Influence of the War on Postwar British Film*, 133.

Ealing Studios repeatedly drew on the transformative promise of ready-to-wear as a method of indicating London's upward trajectory from austerity to modernity. The way that clothing was capable of materially changing a character's circumstances offered an easy metaphor for rising opportunities in work and education, and this relationship between fashion and social betterment is developed in Ealing's 1950 release *Dance Hall,* a drama about four suburban women negotiating romance, jobs and dreams of winning dance competitions. The film is visually divided between a regressive vision of London as a place of dark and dirty Victorian tenement apartments and factories and the lighter, brighter, cleaner and overall more modern looking interior of a fictional Palais de Danse in Chiswick, shot on location at the Hammersmith Palais.[45] This divide is further emphasised by the different material qualities of the clothes worn in each space. The film's central character, Eve, is weighed down in her day-to-day life by the physical heaviness of her practical clothes. Her wool overcoat looks particularly suffocating in the way it swamps her small frame, and this effect is further emphasised by the manner in which the dense, matt fabric absorbs, rather than reflects, light on camera (figure 139). Within the dance hall, however, this working-class woman casts off her headscarf and is unburdened of her daily cares and the difficulties of her class and gender through the lightness of her clothes (figure 140). She wears full cotton skirts with unweighted hems that bounce as she dances and sheer fabrics embellished with sequins that reflect light back to the camera, emphasising her ability to move and be noticed, where the coat slowed her down and diminished her importance by blending her into the background.

The material properties of Eve's sartorial transformations may remove her from the old, worn clothes that evoke ongoing austerity, but her escape from drabness is only temporary and is confined to the fantasy space of the dance hall. Back in the routines of her home and workplace, she plays by more conventional sartorial rules and the realism of the film's costumes extends to the fact that Eve's wardrobe, and as such her capacity for escape from reality, is finite—she appears in only two dresses, one suit, one matching jumper, one coat and one dance dress throughout the film.[46] By exposing the limit of Eve's access to new clothes, even if they were 'affordable' ready-to-wear garments, *Dance Hall* highlights that the hope embodied in new fashions was

[45] Kirkham, 'Dress, Dance, Dreams, and Desire', 198.
[46] Ibid., 201.

not enough to permanently raise the films' female characters above the frustrations, disappointments and fears of the post-war city.

Figure 139:

Dance Hall, scene still showing Eve and Phil in a café, featuring Eve's heavy, dark wool coat. Dir. Charles Crichton, Ealing Studios, 1950.

Figure 140:

Dance Hall, scene still showing (L-R) Eve, Mary, Carol and Georgie in the Chiswick Palais. Dir. Charles Crichton, Ealing Studios, 1950.

The limitations of post-war opportunity are embodied in the fact that, while they admire and desire items of clothing, neither Shirley, Rose nor Eve ever seem to really indulge in their material pleasures. Although Ealing films suggest that deriding limited pleasure from fashion was broadly compatible with moral behavior, much of the

presentation of clothes on-screen remains steeped in the austerity narratives of self-denial. Really enjoying the indulgence of extravagant dressing was reserved for the rule breakers and those operating on the edge of legality. *Dance Hall*'s male spiv characters are sexually enticing in their rejection of heavy wool tweed jackets in favour of American styles, and the spiv suits in *It Always Rains on Sunday* had to be specially commissioned by West End tailors because the wardrobe department were not able to find anything suitably exaggerated to buy off the rack.[47] By custom making these costumes—rather than buying real examples of clothes worn by Londoners—the films were able to make these characters fantastical, giving them greater freedom to transgress acceptable codes of social behavior. The Nylon stockings and colourful black market goods for sale in the street market in *It Always Rains on Sunday*, which was supposedly based on the real-life Petticoat Lane, are made exciting rather scandalous because the sellers who promise that their wares are '100 per cent. guaranteed stolen goods' are themselves unbelievably bedecked in fake furs, patterned turbans and at least one velvet tricorn hat topped with a peacock feather. The material realism offered by the familiar ready-to-wear costumes worn by the central characters in these films would have, if replicated on their morally questionable counterparts, made them seem just a little too relatable and crossed a boundary between anti-social fantasy and real-life illegal behavior.

Darker materialities: fear, uncertainty and frustration

Ealing's post-war comedy films have proved enduringly popular as representations of a gentler past, focused on community and celebrations of small triumphs.[48] They are used as nostalgic shorthand by Daily Mail writers, and condemned by others as out-of-touch visions of 'Little England'.[49] But they are also rife with clues that point to the 'underlying anxieties' of post-war Britain.[50] From frustration at continued austerity to anger at pervading social inequality—as well as broader unspoken fears of an uncertain future, which compelled characters to long for a return to wartime and its reassuring sense of solidarity—Ealing's post-war films are underscored by a sense of

[47] Surowiec, 'Anthony Mendleson', 115.
[48] Barr, *Ealing Studios*, 5.
[49] 'The Dig Society in action: In a scene worthy of an Ealing comedy, villagers waiting for broadband create their own 40-MILE trench to lay cable', *Daily Mail*, 21 April 2012; Massey, *The Independent Group,* 5.
[50] Boyce, *The Lasting Influence of the War on Postwar British Film*, 6.

sadness at the impossibly large gap between their fantastical narratives and the realities of their audiences' experiences.[51] Ealing's comedy output is particularly credited with making space for mainstream films to discuss troubling social narratives—and even celebrate ambiguous morality—through plots, music and actors that conveyed a lighthearted tone.[52] The importance of costumes as subversive tools in these films is less well understood, and the second half of this chapter considers how looking closely at the materiality of clothes on-screen provides a compelling insight into the conflicted nature of the post-war hopes and fears of screen audiences.

Where Ealing's wardrobe team used contemporary ready-to-wear fashions to root films in the present, the incongruous materiality of placing old clothes in contemporary settings could also be used to create a sense of unease by confusing audiences' expectations of what they thought they should be seeing. While each of the Ealing Studios productions discussed in this chapter provides plenty of visual clues that remind the audience of the films contemporary London settings—from the dates visibly printed on newspapers to the places mentioned on billboards—the costumes on the screen often challenge and confuse the temporality of the films. Much like the layers of London's built history that were exposed by bombs in the blitz, the presence of old, out-of-style costumes on-screen dug up and exposed a version of past that intruded, unwelcomely, on the present. The mobile nature of bodies meant that these reminders from the past could arrive in the present suddenly and without warning. Even the fantastically modern interior of *Dance Hall*'s Palais de Danse was unable to provide cinema audiences with safety from this phenomenon; when young dancer Georgie's parents show up unexpectedly to watch her participate in an important dance competition, they upset the carefree and optimistic atmosphere of dance hall with the stifling formality of their dress (figure 141). The darkness, drabness and heaviness of the fabrics they wear bring the old problems of the outside city in to this sanctuary space, creating a temporal disruption that signals the moment when the fantasies of the dance hall begin to crumble. In contrast to the contemporary ready-to-wear of the film's younger characters, these costumes

[51] Barr, *Ealing Studios*, 104-106.
[52] Daubney, 'Music as a satirical device', 61.

punctuate the socially progressive narrative with a reminder that the past lingers and is difficult to escape.

Figure 141:

Dance Hall, scene still showing Georgie's parents, out-of-place in their old-fashioned clothes in the Chiswick Palais. Dir. Charles Crichton, Ealing Studios, 1950.

Old clothes were used more subversively in *Passport to Pimlico* to suggest the complexities of individual characters and their motivations. Although it is largely remembered as a tale of resistance and community spirit, the film's darker, anti-authority, sentiment is encapsulated in its use of out-of-date military dress to ridicule and undermine establishment systems and the regulations that stem from them. These military costumes are worn in strange combinations and odd settings to muddle the audience's understanding of socially accepted power structures and hierarchies by placing these material signifiers of wartime authority within consciously atypical contexts.

The most powerful and ridiculous example of incongruous military attire comes in the form of the makeshift uniform worn by the local policeman, P.C. Spiller, after he has taken on the role of Burgundian passport control officer. Spiller has traded in his official uniform for one that looks to be improvised from parts of his daily wardrobe, combined with a shirt and a British Wolseley pattern helmet of the type worn during the North Africa campaign—presumably remnants from his military service (figure

142).[53] The audience would have understood that this desert uniform was not only utterly out of time but jarringly out-of-place on a London tube carriage. The skewed nature of its effect serves to undercut any claim to authority: the uniform is sloppily worn and ill-fitting, with the tie hanging carelessly to the side to reveal how the shirt gapes where it is stretched by Spiller's rounded stomach, suggesting he has physically let himself go somewhat since the end of the war. The uniform, which was once a material symbol of patriotic service, has become a joke—and one so at the expense of official authority figures, likely resonating with audience members who had personally served. Contrary to many of the narratives told about the hopeful and politically engaged mood of the period, the 'conflict left many members of the public disengaged from the political process and cynical about the motives of all politicians'.[54] In fact, evidence suggests that those most deeply affected, including servicemen and those living in heavily bombed areas, like London, were liable to be the most cynical. Ealing's use of military fancy dress provides a subtle and innocently humorous means of communicating the mistrust of authority that resulted from this cynicism.[55]

Figure 142:

Passport to Pimlico, scene still showing P.C. Spiller in a makeshift uniform as a Burgundian passport control officer on board a tube train. Dir. Henry Cornelius, Ealing Studios, 1949.

[53] Brayley, *The British Army*, 47.
[54] Fielding, 'What Did "The People" Want?', 623.
[55] Ibid., 628.

The film also incorporates non-military items of wartime costume, which are first seen at the moment when the documentation about Burgundy is discovered and the prospect of independence raises its head. Shopkeeper Arthur Pemberton and his daughter Shirley put on old tin helmets in order to explore the crater left by the recently exploded bomb, itself a wartime relic (figure 143). These Zuckerman helmets would have been instantly familiar to Londoners as they had been standard wartime issue for civil defense personnel such as Fire Guards and ARP wardens. Arthur's helmet is even painted with the letters 'PW', indicating his mid-ranking wartime role as a Post Warden and, with this, aiming a subtle dig at his inflated sense of self-importance. Shirley's helmet is of greater material interest, however, thanks to the way she struggles to keep this heavy object balanced on her head, resorting to fasting its chin strap extremely tightly. Many audience members would have empathised with the clear discomfort of this cumbersome object due to their own material memories of wearing these ill-fitting helmets during the war, and this may well have evoked embodied memories of the emotions they associated with civil defense duties during that frightening time. But the heavy materiality of the helmet is also juxtaposed with Shirley's lightweight civilian summer clothes, and the reflective qualities of its dull dented metal contrasts with the shine of her newly painted nails, mixing the material memories of the past with a more modern tactile understanding of the present. The effect of this is comic, but the scale of these remnants of an unpleasant past on the large cinema screen also provided an inescapable provocation to the audience—reminding them of the length of time that had elapsed since the end of the war, and of the continuing distance between promises made by the wartime government about a bright future and the darker realities of their post-war lives.

Which characters had access to new clothes, and which did not, provided a way to signal unfairness in post-war society. In spite of continued rationing and its 'fair shares for all' ethos, perceptions of corruption, and the futility of the authorities to counter this, ran high in post-war Britain.[56] This was due in part to the very real prevalence of black market profiteering, but also because the increased bureaucracy of the post-war Labour government seemed unable to prevent this visible increase in illegal

[56] Kynaston, *Austerity Britain*, 299.

trading while law-abiding citizens suffered under intense shortages of consumer goods.[57] But mistrust of official authority figures ran deeper than this, reflecting a lingering suspicion that, in spite of the promises of social reform, little of importance had changed.[58] The structural inequalities of British society remained unchallenged and even the 'politics of restraint' that formed the basis of much Labour policy was strikingly similar to nineteenth century public school ideals of masculinity that centred around self-denial.[59] Ealing Studios's producer Michael Balcon was one of the many Londoners becoming increasingly disillusioned with the post-war settlement.[60] An ardent socialist, Balcon remained politically independent and skeptical of the Labour Party throughout this period and publicly stated that he wanted Ealing to make films that reflected 'the post-war aspirations not of governments or parties, but of individuals'.[61] The intimate bodily nature of clothing makes it a particularly effective tool for exploring what post-war individuals actually wanted, and a number of Ealing films use costumes to evoke material desires in a way that suggests resistance against Britain's entrenched social systems might involve personal indulgence in some of society's more anti-social impulses.

Figure 143:

Passport to Pimlico, scene still showing Shirley and Arthur Pemberton in old wartime tin helmets. Dir. Henry Cornelius, Ealing Studios, 1949.

[57] Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Austerity in Britain*, 125-126.
[58] *Passport to Pimlico* can be read as a metaphor for disappointment in the post-war government to deliver real, substantial reform. Williams, 'The Repressed Fantastic in Passport to Pimlico', 98-100.
[59] Conekin, Mort and Walters, *Moments of Modernity*, 12.
[60] Sinclair, *War Like a Wasp*, 250.
[61] Duguild, Freeman, Johnson and Williams, 'Introduction: Revisiting Ealing', 8.

London's foremost post-war problem, according to Ealing's 1951 comedy *The Lavender Hill Mob*, was not specific shortages or economic issues, but a lack of real social change, which manifested in the stifling boredom and stasis of day-to-day life. The film tells the story of a bank robbery committed by an ordinary bank clerk and a foundry owner who share a boarding house in Battersea's Lavender Hill. The pair manage to pull off the heist by melting down the stolen gold and making it in to cheap-looking souvenir models of the Eiffel Tower, but end up on the run to Rio de Janeiro when one of the souvenirs accidentally falls into the hands of a policeman. From a strictly narrative perspective, this is a story about the triumph of law and order over criminal enterprise, but the costumes of the central characters ensure that the audience's sympathies remain with the thieves throughout. Their old-fashioned and desperately dull suits belong in a world that has ground to a halt, and they ask the audience to consider that, after a decade of working hard for the national good with little to show for it, any one of us might resort to crime as a means to escape austerity if given the opportunity.

The utterly nondescript costumes worn by the central male characters in their London lives are a material manifestation of the mundane reality of life in a dirty, crowded and generally unpleasant city. Their matt textures blend seamlessly into the backgrounds of soot-stained building facades in the City and the dreary Victorian terraces of suburban Battersea. The garments worn by the bank clerk Henry Holland (played by Alec Guinness) are particularly hard to notice because they are so similar to those of his colleagues: a banker's uniform of bowler hats and dark woolen cloths (figure 144). The repetition of colours, fabrics and shapes makes it hard to distinguish between figures on the screen and gives the impression that post-war London offers very few opportunities for transformation or escape.[62]

Although this trope of the unidentifiable City worker predated the 1940s, the material details of Hollands's outfits stand out in a way that seems particularly out-of-date. The stiffness of the detachable celluloid collars he wears conflate the past and present at a time when integrated collars were becoming increasingly popular. Their uncomfortable formality suggests that Holland has been given no opportunity to shape his job, or his way of life, to fit his individual wants or needs, and that this sense

[62] Boyce, *The Lasting Influence of the War on Postwar British Film*, 71.

of stasis was particularly unbearable at a time when so much social change was occurring elsewhere. This is further emphasised by the fact that Holland's stiffly structured formal dress has no creases or tears to indicate that he has made these garments his own by allowing them mold to the shape of his body through wear, leaving the viewer with the impression that Holland never quite feels a sense of belonging in the role he plays as a suburban bank clerk.

Figure 144:
The Lavender Hill Mob, scene still showing Henry Holland in the foundry, wearing his nondescript banker's uniform. Dir. Charles Crichton, Ealing Studios, 1951.

In contrast to the unchanging banker's uniform that would have allowed Henry Holland to blend in to any City crowd from the past thirty years, the suit Holland wears in the scenes set in Rio, where he is on the run from the police, is both contemporary and highly distinctive. Its generous lapels and the exaggeratedly wide tie it is worn with are reminiscent of the contemporary spiv fashions used in other Ealing films to indicate the allure of rule-breakers. This suit also looks considerably more comfortable and 'lived in'; its lightweight fabric falls in easy creases, offering little resistance to his body. The relaxed nature of the fabric is echoed in soft folds seen in the pocket square, which has replaced the pens he carried in the top pocket of his London suit. Even the colour of the suit points to the fact that Holland's newly acquired wealth offered him a more leisured existence—a London audience would be all too aware that a cream-coloured suit would not stay that colour for long on a morning commute from Battersea. These material differences between dress in

London and Rio suggest that happiness and fulfillment might indeed be found in personal indulgence rather than self-restraint, a message that captured something of the changing national mood in the year that Labour's mantra of austerity was widely rejected at the ballot box.[63]

Figure 145:
The Lavender Hill Mob, scene still showing Henry Holland wearing a lightweight, pale-coloured suit while on the run in Rio de Janeiro. His female companion here was played by Audrey Hepburn in one of her first film appearances. Dir. Charles Crichton, Ealing Studios, 1951.

For all its sense of liberation, *The Lavender Hill Mob* ends with Holland's capture by the British police—restoring a sense of justice with a blunt reminder of the impossibility of escape from the stasis of post-war London life. But at least the film's writers gave Holland an exotic adventure and a real taste of freedom, unlike Ealing's female characters, who find themselves similarly but inescapably trapped in their daily routines. Ealing would have been aware that urban-dwelling women made up the majority of their audiences thanks to the detailed findings of the Wartime Social Survey conducted by the Ministry of Information in 1943, and their writers give female characters an unusual level of agency and emotional complexity compared to many other films made at the time.[64]

[63] Zweiniger-Bargielowska argues that ultimately the Conservative victory of 1951 was due in large part to increasing resentment of austerity measures by voters. See Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Austerity in Britain*.
[64] Mayer, *British Cinemas and their Audiences*, 271.

The immediate post-war years were a time of genuine hope for many women, who really did believe that things could only get better for them.[65] The war had succeeded in increasing women's employment opportunities; the majority of women did not return to more domestic roles after 1945 and employment rates of married women rose during the austerity years.[66] Women's magazines reflect ambitions for better job prospects, more holidays and a general hope that, in the post-war era, men would listen more to their wives' opinions.[67] However, in spite of the great social changes occurring, 'postwar Britain seemed, paradoxically, culturally most conservative during the years of Clement Attlee's Labour government'.[68] This prevailing attitude is reflected in many British films from the 1940s, where the majority of female characters occupy an overwhelmingly domestic position, acting as nurturers and moral guardians; those who deviate from this deeply socially conservative understanding of austerity womanhood are generally punished later in the plot.[69]

Ealing Studios's output during this period is unusual for the way it explicitly tackles women's frustrations at their lack of opportunity, and at the domestic expectations placed upon them to settle down and make do.[70] Even Clarry, the sole female gang member in *Hue and Cry* who runs, climbs and exhibits as much bravery as any of her male counterparts, faces a constant struggle with many of the male gang members to prove her 'worth' because she dresses in a recognisably female manner. While Clarry remains defiant that a dress will not hold her back, she is visually separated from the boys through her costume, in particular the cleanliness of her clothes and their lack of rips or visible damage, which suggest that, even at her young age, she has learned to use her dressed body to perform gender differently to them.[71]

[65] Wilson, 'Austerity in Retrospect', 48.
[66] One 1950 survey found that 46 per cent. of respondents took part in paid work after getting married. Wilson, *Only Halfway to Paradise*, 29.
[67] By 1951, only 11 per cent. of women in the labour market were classed as indoor domestic, a drop of 50 per cent. in 20 years. Giles, *The Parlour and the Suburb*, 67, 157 and 134.
[68] Wilson, *Only Halfway to Paradise*, 5.
[69] Noakes, *War and the British*, 165.
[70] Williams, 'A Feminine Touch?', 186-188.
[71] The similarity of Clarry's gingham pinafore dress to the costume worn by Judy Garland's Dorothy in the 1939 release, *The Wizard of Oz,* perhaps further indicates that her adventure would, like Dorothy's, ultimately end with her performing domestic duties back in the familiar setting of the family home.

Figure 146:
Hue and Cry, scene still showing Clarry in neat gingham pinafore in the male-dominated environment of the ruins. Dir. Charles Crichton, Ealing Studios, 1947.

Other Ealing actors employed the materiality of their costumes to explicitly resist the gendered ways that their characters had been written. Surviving script notes present more two-dimensional depictions of women than the well-rounded and realistic characters eventually seen on-screen. The script writers repeatedly use written fashions to roundly condemn female characters who do not 'know their place', turning their foolish attempts to transgress their class or age into opportunities to laugh at them. The script notes for *Passport to Pimlico* present Molly as vulgar—'a would-be glamorous girl in her early twenties who has seen too many films, and is now no longer herself', and the dress shop owner Edie Randall is unkindly described as 'a woman in the early forties who makes pathetic attempts to keep abreast of modern syles, but it seems a pity that she tries…'. In contrast, female characters whose appearance fits comfortably into socially conservative norms are treated with more kindness, including Mrs Pemberton, who has a 'comfortable, kind 'body' with greying hair, and neat but old-fashioned clothes usually covered by an overall or apron'. According to the writers, these visual attributes show that she is worthy of praise because she 'knows herself and is happy in the unambitious routines of her daily life'.[72]

[72] Barr, *Ealing Studios*, 99-100.

The materiality of real clothes on-screen creates quite a different impression of these three characters because it evokes the audience's understanding of the complex range of emotions that are contained within in the act of dressing. The actors were materially familiar with their costumes because they wore similar ready-to-wear garments in their daily lives, and this embodied understanding allowed them to develop their characters by paying careful attention to the way they wore these clothes. The details of how belts were tied and dress straps slipped off shoulders communicated that these on-screen fictions were complex individuals with hopes as fragile and fears as dark as their own. This resonated deeply with audiences who were also able to infer connections to their own fashionable experiences, enabling them to empathise with the gut-wrenching disappointment of dressing hopefully in your best clothes, only to find you are still invisible to the person you set out to impress, and understand that, for a woman over the age of 30, setting your hair in rags to achieve a desired hairstyle expressed more than mere vanity (figure 147).

Figure 147:

Passport to Pimlico, scene still showing dress shop owner Edie Randall wearing a bold patterned dressing gown with her hair set in rags. Dir. Henry Cornelius, Ealing Studios, 1949.

Looking closely at the way actors wear their costumes, and particularly at how they put them on and take them off, shows that the social meaning of an item of clothing could be disrupted by the way it was worn. Housecoats and aprons are used as a rather blunt tool to signify the respectability of women in a number of Ealing Studios productions.[73] Yet the value—or lack thereof—of this respectability is seriously challenged by the different ways the actors wear them. Even identical garments had their meanings changed in this way; the housecoat worn by Joe Kirby's mother in *Hue and Cry* was reused by Mrs Pemberton in *Passport to Pimlico,* but where Mrs Kirby wears it tightly wrapped around her in keeping with the firm sense of control she has over herself and her household (figure 148), Mrs Pemberton's housecoat is worn looser and flaps uncontrollably in the breeze, emphasising the shape of her middle aged body (figure 149).[74] Mrs Pemberton's housecoat may signify respectability, but the way it is worn hints of exhaustion and resignation.

Figure 148:

Hue and Cry, scene still showing Mrs Kirby standing by the dinner table in her housecoat. Dir. Charles Crichton, Ealing Studios, 1947.

[73] Brunsdon, *London in Cinema*, 152.

[74] This is not the only time re-used costumes can be spotted in different Ealing films, suggesting that it was a reasonably common practice for the Studios' wardrobe department.

Figure 149:
Passport to Pimlico, scene still showing Mrs Pemberton standing by the bomb crater in her housecoat. Dir. Henry Cornelius, Ealing Studios, 1949.

A similar sense of resignation is communicated in the heavy, slow reluctance with which Rose Sandigate buttons her clothes in *It Always Rains on Sunday*, ahead of a day of cooking and housekeeping. This provides a counterpoint to the neat, contemporary clothes themselves, which help Rose keep up the surface appearance of a respectable East End housewife. Audiences would have understood, in line with the social conventions of the day, that marriage liberated Rose by giving her a level of financial security and respectability she did not have as a single barmaid, but her reluctance to get dressed forces the audience to ask whether this is really a desirable kind of freedom.[75] This is further emphasised by the relationship Rose has to other people's clothing. When Rose tears her stepdaughter's brightly patterned dress during a scuffle between the two, the drama of the ripping fabric not only evokes a sense of sadness in the destruction of a much-loved item of clothing, but a reminder that the hopes Rose invested in her own fashionable appearance when she was younger failed to deliver her the exciting, romantic life she aspired to. The dress rips along its seams, breaking the transformative garment back into flat component pieces of fabric that communicate a warning from Rose to her stepdaughter—telling her that she is wrong to believe she can escape the boredom of domestic life, no matter how much dressing up she does.

[75] Gillett, *The British working class*, 45.

Figure 150:
It Always Rains on Sunday, scene still showing Vi Sandigate's Horrockses dress, ripped along the seams. Dir. Rober Hamer, Ealing Studios, 1947.

In each of these cases, it is the relationship between the actor's body and the garments, rather than the choice of costume itself, that communicates the depths of the characters's feelings and reveals a more nuanced, and even morally ambiguous, understanding of women's roles in post-war society. Where a garment's colour or pattern might be able to signify modernity, or an audience might wonder where Rose Sandigate could derive joy when the most brightly coloured item in her wardrobe was her floral apron, it is in the wearing of these costumes that the characters become complex beings capable of contradictory emotions. Even *Dance Hall,* a film with a script considered to be simplistic by Ealing Studios standards, manages to use the pride with which Eve wears her unattractive factory overalls to evoke the conflicted desires of a young, newly married woman who wants more than society was willing to offer.[76] It was this embodied understanding of the power of clothes on-screen to evoke multiple, deeply personal memories and empathetic understanding that helped Ealing Studios create a sense of realism at this time of rapid change, conflicted hopes and fears, and clashing party political narratives of austerity.

[76] Eve wears this dirty, worn garment with more confidence than the dance hall dresses her husband buys for her once she gives up work to look after their home, implying her reluctance to choose between the binary roles of wife and worker.

Selling London fashions on- and off-screen

The involved material reactions of London audiences to clothes on-screen in Ealing films offers an insight into how costumes might have influenced the choices people made about fashionable consumption. London's film industry was particularly influential in the way British audiences thought about fashion thanks to both large audience figures and the thriving genre of fan magazines—such as *Picturegoer*—and annuals including *Film Parade,* which was produced by Marks and Spencer, a purveyor of mid-market fashions.[77] As a result of this central position, on-screen representations of fashion formed threads that joined together with the stories Londoners were told by fashion magazines, clothing brands and their peers to form a web of semi-fictional narratives that made up their individual understanding of the meaning of London fashion. The interconnected nature of these different stories makes it imperative that fashion on film is not considered as a stand-alone area of study, but as part of a wider dialogue about the production of fashion cultures in post-war London, alongside the business of making and selling clothes, because the clothes Londoners consumed visually on-screen related to the ones they consumed in real life.

There is little by way of statistical evidence to confirm exactly how influential cinema costumes were on the way different demographics thought about fashion, but fragments certainly suggest that seeing clothes on-screen was an important source of fashionable information for many individuals. One 1947 survey of British cinema audiences found that cinema-goers recognised and related to clothes on-screen, and that they took inspiration from them.[78] Cinema would likely have been a particularly important source of fashion for the most regular attenders—young, female urban inhabitants with jobs that gave them the freedom of some disposable income—by good fortune, the same demographic identified as being susceptible to make fashion

[77] These publications attributed equal importance to Hollywood and London film fashions. *Film Parade*, 1948, 1. Marks and Spencer Archive, T27/2/151. They primarily profiled actors using film stills which showed them in costume. This blurred the boundaries between the spaces of reality and fiction and further encouraged audiences to relate to film costume in the same way they would view the clothes of someone they encountered on the street. Munich, *Fashion in Film*, 1.
[78] Mayer, *British Cinemas and their Audiences*, 101.

purchases in response to advertising promotions.[79] This correlation is further evidenced by the large number of fan magazines published in the immediate post-war period that contained information about new trends, fashion photo shoots, and fashion adverts featuring actors. The way that these publications drew on the materiality of clothes on-screen to sell London fashions further illuminates the role that London cinema played in shaping the way the post-war city dressed.

Figure 151:

Cover image promising 'British Fashions—British Stars'. *Film and Fashion Review*, August 1948, cover.

[79] The Wartime Social Survey in 1943 found that the groups with the highest cinema attendance were women, the young, working class, town dwellers, and factory and clerical workers. Mayer, *British Cinemas and their Audiences*, 271.

Not all magazines were equally successful in taking advantage of the marketing opportunities offered by the combination of fashion and film. Marks and Spencer may have sold *Film Parade* in the same stores as their clothes, but the annual's editorial content largely ignores the subject of British ready-to-wear fashion. Although the publication occasionally accompanies photographs of actors with descriptions of the styles they are wearing, it never makes any direct links between the clothes worn by actors and the garments available to buy in Marks and Spencer stores.[80] In contrast, *Picturegoer* and *Film and Fashion* magazines were much cannier at developing their editorial content to capitalise on the fashionable desires of their readers and the marketing opportunities these offered. Surprisingly, both magazines achieved this by turning their backs on the glamour of Hollywood stars and focusing their content on London fashions, modelled by London actors (figure 151).

Picturegoer and *Film and Fashion* both moved to exploit a gap in the market that had also been spotted by J. Arthur Rank, owner of a film company titled the J. Arthur Rank Organisation, which controlled a number of British cinemas, film studios (including Ealing), and an acting agency comprised of young British talent that was commonly referred to as 'The Charm School'.[81] British audiences, it was theorised, were unable to relate to the high-gloss surface glamour of Hollywood stars—when they went to the cinema, the British public wanted the option to watch people more recognisably like themselves. Letters to film magazines by female cinema-goers between 1946 and 1948 frequently make complaints to this effect. In particular, they express frustration at the lack of working women, of older women, and of storylines featuring women who achieve more than falling in love.[82] As one Vi Brook from Twickenham put it:

> We get youth dished up and rammed in our ears and down our throats so persistently by Hollywood and writers of popular fiction, that any sensitive persons over thirty could be excused for wondering sadly if it wouldn't be best to put their supposedly grey heads in the nearest oven…[83]

[80] *Film Parade* annuals 1947 to 1949. Marks and Spencer Archive, T27/2/150-1.
[81] Macnab, *J. Arthur Rank and the British Film Industry*, 141.
[82] There is an especially vitriolic response from a number of *Picturegoer*'s female readers to an article criticising women's romantic taste in films. *Picturegoer* 30 August 1947, 14. It was not, however, only women who felt this way—T. E. B. Clarke (writer of *Passport to Pimlico*) also pleaded screenwriters to create more realistic women, asking 'Please, just for a change, may we one day see a girl calling at Daddy's business premises to change a laddered stocking or seek the office boy's help with her football pools…?' *Picturegoer*, 9 July 1949, 6.
[83] *Picturegoer*, 13 September 1947, 14.

Figure 152:

Picturegoer doubts whether a highly-posed Gloria de Haven has 'ever actually dived off at the deep end' in her swimsuit. *Picturegoer*, 2 July 1949, 3.

Figure 153:

Barbara Murray and Bernard Farrel relax on location while filming *Passport to Pimlico*. Murray's pose is the antithesis of a pin-up shot—crouching on London bomb rubble while smoking a cigarette. *Picturegoer*, 14 August 1948, 5.

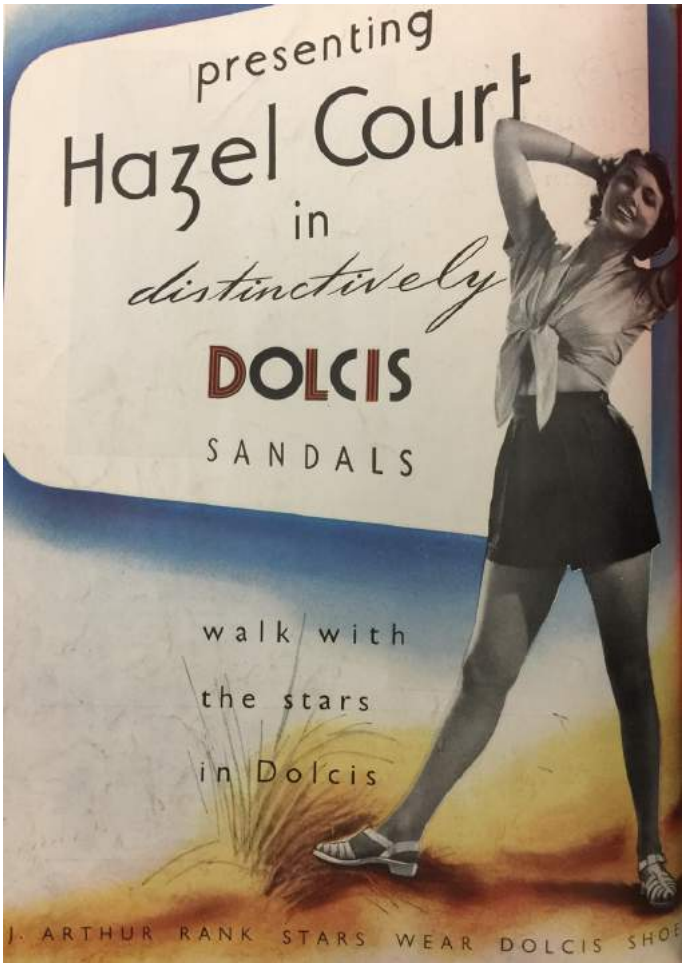

Figure 154:
'walk with the starts in Dolcis' advert for Dolcis shoes. *Film-Fashion Review*, May 1948, back cover.

Heading their readers' and viewers' calls, British magazine editors and film producers set out to create a more relatable image of women. Film magazines began to openly ridicule the styling of Hollywood actors in studio glamour shots (figure 152) and, in 1947, Rank announced a plan to create a pool of British actors to counteract the perceived fakery of Hollywood. He promised that, under his guidance, 'stars are going to become real people again', and one of the key ways he set about achieving this aim was by dressing actors in affordable London ready-to-wear fashions.[84] The Rank

[84] *Picturegoer*, 1 February 1947, 6.

Organisation set up connections to a number of British fashion companies, most notably Horrockses Fashions, who provided costumes for *It Always Rains on Sunday*, and Dolcis shoes, who ran a prominent advertising campaign across different film magazines featuring actors signed to the Rank Organisation, with the tag-line 'walk with the stars in Dolcis' (figure 154). These commercial partnerships allowed the Rank Organisation to further emphasise the down-to-earth nature of the ready-to-wear costumed characters in Ealing films, because the adverts promised audiences that these film stars dressed in the same clothes as they did. This vision of ordinariness provided a useful marketing tools for the films themselves, and Ealing promoted their work with relaxed 'behind the scenes' photographs in film magazines, shot in a way that purposefully provided a stark contrast to the highly-posed shots released by Hollywood studios.

Just as the Rank Organisation understood that relatable stars were what their audiences wanted to see on-screen, film magazines knew that this was also the case on the page, and that clothing provided a key way to signal relatability. Kate Quinlan and Enid O'Neill's fashion columns in *Picturegoer* were careful to emphasise the affordability of the garments they featured or, failing that, to provide instructions as to how the reader could produce inexpensive do-it-yourself versions of high-end fashions.[85] Films that showed expensive couture fashions were branded as boring, including the 1949 release *Maytime in Mayfair*, which, in spite of featuring an array of clothes from 'just about every famous dress house in the country', offered Kate Quinlan little of visual interest—'It was a perfect example', she says, 'of the uninterested viewing the inaccessible'.[86]

Both the Rank Organisation and the magazines in which their work featured deliberately blurred the boundaries between reality and construct in relation to how fashions were worn on- and off-screen. The Rank Organisation possessed a high level of influence over the post-war British press, and leveraged this by 'loaning' out their actors to magazines ranging from fan publications to *Harper's Bazaar* for fashion photoshoots in which they wore 'London' brands including Horrockses Fashion,

[85] *Picturegoer*, 23 July 1949 19; 22 October 1949 15.
[86] Quinlan does reluctantly concede that one of the Norman Hartnell wedding dresses was rather lovely. *Picturegoer*, 16 July 1949, 17.

15

Stars in the Swim

Sun time means sand time. The sun tan! Here are five ways to dress for it—the stars' latest lines of in- and out-of-water wear

THE stars do shine in the sun—as PICTUREGOER discovered when it tracked down this informal beach party not a hundred miles away from London. Honor Blackman, Lana Morris, Diana Dors, Jane Hylton and Wendy Gibb staged a preview of the latest in beach and playtime wear when they took advantage of one of 1950's first appearances of Ole Man Sol.

Blonde Diana Dors, above, shows us one of the new two-piece bathing suits—in a bright yellow poplin, edged with brilliant royal blue. The brief shorts are cut "little boy" style.

There's something for all tastes in the playtime styles. Vivacious Wendy Gibb (remember her in *The Rugged O'Riordans?*) wears a dashing pirate outfit with emerald green wool jeans buckling just below the knee; Diana relaxes in a pink and white striped wool bathing suit—brief but chic; and Honor Blackman sports a blue and white striped two-piece dress in cotton.

Lana Morris is feeling a little chilly in spite of the bright sunshine, so she has topped her very short shorts with one of the new thigh-length coats in a bright scarlet wool.

Last but not least comes Jane Hylton wearing the very latest in play-suits. It is an adaptation from Jacques Fath in white piqué. The halter neckline buttons up high in front, but plunges to the waistline at the back.

For the record, the designers of the outfits shown are: Two-piece bathing suit, Brenner Sports; pirate outfit, striped swim-suit, two-piece dress and short coat, Dorville; white piqué play-suit, Spectator Sports.

ENID O'NEILL

Beauty and the Beach. The cast is: Wendy Gibb, as the pirate girl, and "beachcombers" Diana Dors, Honor Blackman, Jane Hylton and Lana Morris

Figure 155:

'Stars in the Swim' fashion feature. *Picturegoer*, 3 June 1950, 14.

Brenner Sports and Dorville.[87] Some of these features echoed the beach-wear photo shoots of Hollywood studios (figure 155), whereas others more closely resembled conventional fashion spreads or the promotional material produced by British department stores (figure 156), encouraging readers to associate these pages with the credibility of more established sources of fashionable information. All of these spreads, however, included details about the actor, the most recent film they featured in, and the branded ready-to-wear clothing they were modelling. More subtly, these actors also appeared in biographical features in which they joined a journalist whilst on a shopping trip for clothes in London's West End, or discussed their wardrobes—both on- and off-screen—always making sure to state their enjoyment of fashion whilst simultaneously emphasising the ordinariness of their shopping habits.[88]

This systematic deconstruction of the difference between the actors of the Rank Organisation and the characters they played on-screen culminated with the release of *Dance Hall*. The four female leads were promoted prominently in film magazine fashion features in which it was suggested that, to add to the realism of the production, the actors not only trained to work the machinery in the factory that appears in the film, they also wore some of their own personal clothes on-screen (figure 157).[89] This would have been a highly unusual practice for Ealing's wardrobe department, but in making this unlikely claim, they heightened the appeal of the film's 'realistic' portrayal of a type of glamour achievable by young London women. In turn, this increased the commercial opportunities the film offered London fashion brands. By covering details of *Dance Hall*'s costumes, film magazines were, quite literally, able to offer cinema-goers the opportunity to dress as film stars, albeit ones who wore affordable medium-quality clothes from London ready-to-wear brands.[90]

[87] Macnab, *J. Arthur Rank and the British Film Industry*, 172.
[88] London was always the setting for these features, which often seem to dwell more on the prestige of London as a shopping location than they do on the goods actually purchased. See *Harper's Bazaar*, March 1948, 48-49; *Film-Fashion Review,* April 1948, 18-19; *Film and Fashion Outlook*, October 1948, 19.
[89] *Picturegoer*, 1 April 1950, 21.
[90] Enid O'Neill devoted an entire column to discussing the similarities between Skarco brand skirts and those featured in *Dance Hall*, including information on pricing and stockists. *Picturegoer*, 25 February 1950, 25.

Tune-in to Teen-age

This new bonnet-shaped hat is in pale yellow, trimmed with nigger grosgrain. From the Marshall and Snelgrove teen-age department, where are shown a large range of straws and felts at reasonable prices.

Also from Windsmoor comes this fine wool skirt, in navy and a range of other colours. It has a concealed zip-fastener, making the wide waistband and bow fastening a fixture.

Slacks for the country every time, preferably man-tailored and in grey hopsack like those worn by Peggy Evans.

Dorville's coolie sweater in turquoise wool is worn by Kathleen Stuart. This sort of thing is essential for a holiday and an everlasting stand-by.

Youthfully sophisticated is this black wool dress, trimmed with jet. Designed by *Lady in Black*, it follows the new French trend of accentuating the hip line. Modelled by Hazel Court.

An all-purpose coat from Windsmoor. It is made in wool georgette, in a wide range of pastel colours as well as in navy and black. With the new full back and sloping shoulders, it is on sale at all the leading stores.

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Figure 156:

'Tune-in to Teen-age' fashion feature, modelled by actors signed to the J. Arthur Rank Organisation. *Film-Fashion Review*, June 1948, 23.

Pet Clark's on-off set rig is a yellow jumper with brown skirt

TEENAGE SIDESHOW

New styles for youngsters will be seen in "Dance Hall"

GOOD news for teenagers. After all the fashion shows for the exclusive inner ring, they're to have a useful show of their own.

It will appear in the new film, *Dance Hall*, for in this Ealing production, Pet Clark, who seems to be setting the styles for the youngsters of the screen, wears a number of outfits from her own wardrobe. And how handy it is that *Dance Hall* is due to make its appearance in the merry month of May, when we'll be making final decisions on our new outfits.

Pet doesn't make the mistake of dressing "above" her age. She favours the simple styles—in fact, the first thing that impresses you on looking through her wardrobe is the number of blouses, jumpers and skirts.

One of her own skirts, which she wears in *Dance Hall*, is in an accordian-pleated brown wool. In the film it goes with a pink wool blouse, but off the set Pet has given it a yellow jumper with polar neck and long sleeves.

For evening, Pet has another sweater, this time in white wool dotted with sequins.

Her one evening dress which she wears for a sequence in the film is, in its pastel-coloured beauty, everyone's dream dress. It has an enormously full skirt, consisting of layer on layer of pink net, while the sequin-studded bodice in blue lace comes just to the edge of the shoulder and has long sleeves.

Her green tweed coat which she wears in *Dance Hall* is the ideal easy-to-wear style for a young girl. It is loose-fitting, has an inverted pleat at the back, and buttons up to the neck.

Other clothes from *Dance Hall* include a tie-silk dress in a small black and white check, which has a full skirt and a big, cheeky butterfly bow at the neck, and a summer cotton dress in pale blue with a band of darker blue around the hem.

The summer dress is particularly useful, because it has a drawstring neckline which can be adjusted so that it can be worn semi-off-shoulder for evening.

PET LIKES: Skirts with a gay flair; white collars; bolero suits; pinafore frocks, and simple, delicate jewellery.

PET DISLIKES: Straight skirts (unflattering to young curves); strapless evening dresses; voluminous-looking clothes which would envelop her too much, and ear-rings.

Pet's Advice

. . . Have fun with fashion. Use peddle pushers, scatterpins, straw jewellery.

. . . Pass-by sophisticated frills for informal, easy-to-wear dresses. Go for simplicity.

. . . Ignore fashion unless it suits you. Crop your hair, wear it in a bang, or cultivate a long bob. The teenager does not need to be a slave to any vogue to be successful. It's what *suits* you that counts in the fashion field.

★ ★ ***Film Fashions by Enid O'Neill*** ★ ★

Figure 157:

'Film Fashions' featuring Pat Clark discussing *Dance Hall*. *Picturegoer,* 1 April 1950, 21.

Re-watching austerity fashions

'Reading' the details of film costumes from Ealing Studios's productions and considering how they communicate shared, embodied experiences of post-war clothing demonstrates that the presentation of clothes on-screen did more than just support the narrative told by the script.[91] Through their materiality, costumes reveal complex and often contradictory sets of emotions relating to post-war social change and austerity conditions, and Ealing's costume choices can be seen to have been particularly effective on this front because of the relatable nature of the garments used and the realism with which they were worn. But the visual importance placed on the materiality of these costumes has ramifications beyond merely helping Ealing Studios transcend 'the division between realism and tinsel'.[92] The presentation of fashion on-screen was connected to the business of fashion in the city through joint promotions with fashion brands who provided costumes for films and benefitted from magazine photo shoots in which actors modelled their garments. But more than this, the material presentation of costume demonstrates how fashion played an integral role in the way Londoners understood austerity, helping people locate themselves, their desires, and their fears in the physical and cultural landscape of the post-war city. The costumes, which communicated with audiences through a shared language of material experience, provided a safe focus towards which they could channel their emotions. By evoking a range of feelings in audience members, the costumes allowed individuals to experience a cathartic purging of their own conflicted sentiments towards this strange time of hope, change and tremendous loss.[93]

While there are certainly differences between the way costume is used across these films, they share a common interest in the ability of clothes to transgress social norms and evoke the moral ambiguity of life in post-war London.[94] Unlike many Hollywood films from the era, the Ealing comedies of the 1940s did not offer an escape from

[91] This chapter responds to calls to consider film costumes as 'an end unto themselves'. Bruzzi, Undressing Cinema, xiv.
[92] Murphy, *Realism and Tinsel*, 233.
[93] By catharsis, this is referring to the sense of pleasurable calm achieved by witnessing a tragic narrative unfold from beginning to end, allowing the audience to imagine the worst that could happen, experiencing a sense of completion as this unfolds and then a sense of relief at remembering that this is fiction. See Nuttall, *Why Does Tragedy Give Pleasure?*, 36, 76.
[94] These film choices also respond to calls to collapse the artificial distinctions between the different genres of film the studios produced. O'Sullivan, 'Ealing comedies 1947-57', 71.

austerity through fantasy or historical costumes.[95] Instead, they held a mirror to it, exaggerating and distorting aspects of austerity in order to provoke cathartic audience responses. The films offer a relatable view of 1940s London as a place largely populated with well-intentioned, if flawed, characters.[96] These characters—both male and female—differ significantly from later cinematic depictions of the 1940s in their portrayal of class. While the later war films of the 1950s show a conflict won by 'self-controlled upper and middle-class officers in charge of well-disciplined and loyal lower-class servicemen', the Ealing Comedies show a peace won by the dignity, bravery and sense of fair-play of the masses.[97] But they also show London as a place of conflicted moralities and explore the 'hybrid' nature of what it meant to be British in a post-war world, suggesting that a true sense of belonging could only be achieved by smearing strict definitions of nationality and class.[98]

Enlarged on a cinema screen, Ealing films presented audiences with a hyper-real version of the familiar realities of their own clothes. The documentary-inspired style of the cinematography of these films highlights the materiality of how clothes are worn in unusual detail for fiction films of the time. It draws attention to marks of wear in the form of pulled threads and worn patches that might otherwise seem insignificant, and exaggerates the violence of ripped seams. Looking closely at this material presentation of costume on-screen reveals that the problems of austerity London went far deeper than shortages and rationing. For all the humour, comradery and localised community spirit these films are largely remembered for, they also use the materiality of clothes on-screen to present an unpleasant, dirty and broken city in which individuals find themselves trapped, living stifling lives from which there seems no hope of escape. Although this version of London is exaggerated and draws on impossible geographies and costumes that rarely resemble those seen in documentary images of the time, it evokes a compellingly realistic urban mise-en-scène that demonstrates how looking at fictional London is sometimes necessary to understand the real place, because these stories shaped the way people understood

[95] David Lean said that the success of *Brief Encounter* (1945) was because of the film's realness, explaining that the British public had learned to value this quality as a result of the 'life and death reality of the Blitz'. Sinclair, *War Like a Wasp*, 248.
[96] This is a sharp contrast to the films and television dramas made about the Second World War in the 1950s and 1960s, which focus on patriotic sacrifice and male heroism. Noakes, 'Popular memory, popular culture', 680.
[97] Summerfield, 'Film and Popular Memory', 172.
[98] Shonfield, *Walls Have Feelings*, 15.

the relationship between themselves, their clothes, and the city.[99] Furthermore, the way that coverage of on-screen fashions in film magazines actively blurred the boundaries between real and fictional ready-to-wear fashions in order to promote both the films and the material garments within them demonstrates how closely entwined the material presentation of clothes on-screen was with the business of fashion retail and London consumption habits.

Considering the materiality of the clothes in these films also raises important questions about the way that austerity fashion has been remembered in the British cultural imagination.[100] While prevailing social and cultural values in the 1940s certainly shaped how fashion was portrayed on-screen at the time, the ways the clothes in these films have subsequently been discussed as representations of austerity moralities has played a role in crafting our current understandings of national, cultural and class identity in Britain.[101] These orthodoxies find heroism in the wearing of old worn clothes and plucky underdog spirit in clever legal loopholes around rationing. In turn, these dominant narratives about the representational meaning of costume in Ealing's productions have validated a particular set of collective memories about austerity fashion—which revolve around narratives of creative making do and the nobility of sartorial sacrifice for the greater good—at the expense of excluding divergent experiences.[102]

The continuing popularity of the Ealing comedies and the prevailing cultural nostalgia for austerity that they feed makes it all the more important to pay attention to the small details of these costumes.[103] Considering the material memories these details might have evoked disrupts dominant austerity narratives by revealing a range of different audience perspectives that offer a more nuanced understanding of the multiple meanings of fashion at a time of austerity. These speak of the contrasting experiences of those enabled by post-war change and those frustrated by the lack of progress they perceived in reforms that were achieved through legislation, rather than bottom-up social change, leaving inequality and sexism ingrained into the 'New

[99] Brunsdon, *London in Cinema*, 5.
[100] Munich, 'Fashioning National Identities', 233.
[101] Hole. 'Does Dress Tell the Nation's Story?', 281-300.
[102] Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country*, 191; Misztal, *Theories of Social Remembering*, 10-16.
[103] The popularity of the Ealing comedies has proved especially enduring, and these regularly feature on lists of the 'Best British Films'.

Jerusalem' of post-war Britain.[104] Moreover, these material details demonstrate the danger of making generalisations about 'London fashion' and its meanings, as if the city was a coherent whole rather than a collection of diverse and contradictory places. Ealing's map of fashionable London presents a city sartorially divided by place, politics, age and gender. Clothes on-screen convey a material understanding that the children in *Hue and Cry* do not belong in the high-end department store, and that the dirty environment of the foundry in *The Lavender Hill Mob* is no place for women. If the costumes in Ealing films demonstrate anything with certainty, it is that the different spaces of the city remained strictly classed and gendered in the immediate post-war period.[105]

[104] Morgan, *The People's Peace*, 108.
[105] Marwick, *British Society Since 1945*, 55.

Archival encounter no. 7:

Z875a-b: Red suede shoes from Dolcis with platform soles and ankle straps. CC41 marked

Figure 158:

Red suede shoes from Dolcis with CC41 mark. Museum of London, Z875a-b.

It is October 2015, and I am scanning my eyes across two shelves of women's shoes from the 1940s, neatly arranged in pairs. Most are instantly recognisable as Utility shoes, identified by practical markers such as their thick, low heels and lace-up fastenings. Some have hard-wearing wooden soles, and others are warmly fleece-lined, telling narratives of rubber shortages, fuel shortages and petrol shortages that stretched beyond the end of the war.[1] Amidst the sea of Utility browns and maroons, one pair catches my eye; they are bright red. I reach to pick the left shoe up. From the towering three-inch heel to the highly decorative uppers, with their lattice effect cut-outs and scalloped edging, this is a shoe that demands attention. It is a shoe that would draw passers-by to notice the body of the wearer by highlighting their ankles in a crisscrossing of delicate red straps, and a shoe that, thanks to the height of its heel, would alter the way the wearer stood or walked, causing them to take on the performance of a new physicality. Yet, in the midst of this visual feast, I see the unmistakable thick black of a CC41 stamp, which brands these shoes as part of the official government-regulated Utility scheme.

Red shoes have well documented cultural associations with adventure, escape and desire.[2] Although there seems little space for such associations in a narrative of austerity that equates shortages and Utility with consumer demands for practicality, these shoes are no anomaly. The Museum of London collection alone boasts two pairs of bright red Utility shoes. These red shoes suggest that, even at a time of austerity, successful mid-market shoe makers such as Dolcis still used desire and fantasy to sell their products to the public.[3]

In contrast to their wartime adverts, which promised comfort and rural leisure, Dolcis' post-war adverts focused on glamorous urban settings, cinematic associations, and a distinctly more international outlook.[4] This shift in marketing accompanied a move towards less practical designs featuring higher, narrower heels and the incorporation

[1] Pair of slippers. Museum of London, 79.24/16a-b; Brown suede open tab clogs. Museum of London, 90.163/8a-b.
[2] Davidson, 'Sex and Sin'.
[3] Lily Silberberg, a working-class daughter of a journeyman tailor and button-hole hand, recalled that even though all their clothes were acquired second-hand, her mother could still afford to buy her patent leather Dolcis shoes for best. *An Oral History of British Fashion*. British Library, C1046/02, 65.
[4] As one advert from 1946 promised shoppers: 'If your taste runs transatlantic [Dolcis shops offer] a choice of styles greater even than any on fifth avenue'. Dolcis Advert, 1946. Alamy, D86DP6. For contrast see Dolcis Advert, 1943. Alamy, GDA600.

of more decorative features after the removal of austerity style restrictions on footwear from 1 April 1946.[5] The carefully repaired heels of this particular pair indicates that Dolcis were correct to understand that austerity conditions did not dampen the attraction of fashionable fantasy for whomever regularly wore them, hinting that the relationship between regulated austerity and fashionable fantasy was nuanced at this time, and that Utility and glamour were certainly not mutually exclusive.

Figure 159:

Interior of red suede shoes showing worn Dolcis stamp. Museum of London, Z875a-b.

[5] Speech on 'Clothing and Footwear (Style Restrictions, Removal)'. Hansard, HC Deb 04 March 1946 vol 420 cc9-10.

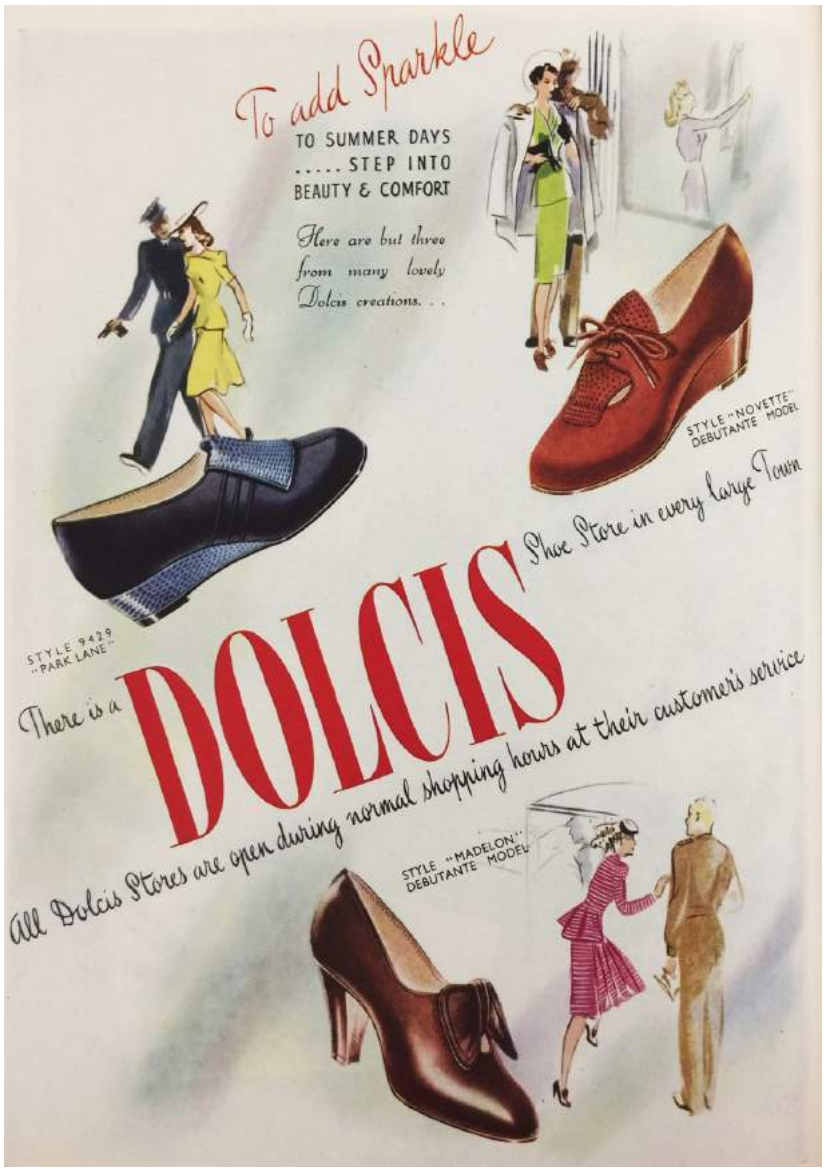

Figure 160:

Dolcis shoes advert. *Harper's Bazaar*, June 1945, 20.

Seven:

Conclusion

Figure 161:

East End market, 1948. Bob Collins, Museum of London, IN37818.

On Monday 17 March 1952, the new Conservative government finally revoked the remaining 118 Utility Orders on apparel, footwear and furniture, ending a decade of government legislation concerning the production of clothing. A number of Labour politicians expressed concern at this move, explaining that it might undo progress towards better quality mass-manufactured fashions, but their fears were unjustified: official 'austerity' legislation had materially changed British fashion for good.[1] Perhaps nowhere were these changes felt more deeply than in London, although their far-reaching impact has been obscured behind historical orthodoxies of austerity fashion that concentrate on the short-term consequences of rationing, shortages and design restrictions. Certainly, this period did see a relaxing of certain sartorial rules—although often the effect of this was temporary—and rationing did curtail some people's shopping habits, but many others found that their fashionable consumption was no more limited by coupons in the 1940s than it had been by their bank balances in the 1930s.[2] In response to the most frequent claim about the impact of government intervention—that it democratised fashion—this research implies that, while there is evidence to suggest that austerity did reduce class-based distinctions in women's dress, this resulted less from design regulations, as usually asserted, than the longer-term consequences of government regulation and economic circumstances on the development of mass-market ready-to-wear.[3] As such, this conclusion looks beyond rationing, shortages and design restrictions to see the more fundamental changes that occurred to how fashion was made and sold in the city, and as a consequence, how the meaning of 'London fashion' evolved in response to austerity.

Specifically, this conclusion considers how the relationship between fashion and the city was reshaped by both official austerity policies and the influence of austerity cultures, paying particular attention to the speed of the changes wrought. From the geographies of manufacturing to the symbolic use of London postcodes on garment labels, it compiles a comprehensive impression of these changes and asks how this broader understanding of the systems that made up London fashion in the post-war

[1] John Edwards's vocal opposition to the revocation can be read in Hansard. *Hansard,* HC Deb vol 499 col 1785, 1 May 1952.
[2] Deirdre Murphy has described how many of the impacts of austerity on the London season were temporary. See Murphy, 'Austerity at Court: 1939-1958'. While at the other end of the socio-economic spectrum, Alison Slater argues the impact of rationing was not felt amongst working class women. Slater, 'Make-do-and-Mend', 41-55.
[3] The origins of the claim towards democratisation lie in a contemporary publication by Ferdynand Zweig. See Zweig, *Women's Life and Labour*, 124.

period might alter our understanding of how London developed as a fashion city in subsequent decades. It also unpicks the impact of incorporating more-than-representational research approaches on this project's findings. This impact is traced in the new historical perspectives that have been uncovered, but it is also felt in the connections the project opens up between the past and the present. Through this, it suggests that more-than-representational fashion histories open up interdisciplinary connections that highlight the broader relevance of fashion as a tool through which we can better understand the world around us. As a result, this conclusion ends by considering what possible implications this collaborative research project might have for the way austerity fashion from museum collections is used and displayed in the future. In response to increasing opportunities for academic institutions and museums to collaborate on research and exhibition projects, it argues that fashion objects should be used to create encounters with the past, rather than just represent existing historical narratives.[4]

'Paris makes fashion, London makes clothes'[5]

In the face of lost fashion cultures and established networks, London fashion was presented with an opportunity to redefine and reinvent itself in the aftermath of the Second World War. This thesis adds a new perspective to previous studies of post-war fashion by looking beyond the activities of a narrow band of high-end fashion houses to examine the broader workings of the city's industry: in doing so, it disrupts the accepted historical geographies of London fashion, prompting a reconsideration of both the distribution of the fashion industry within the city and the nature and status of London fashion in relation to other cities.

While London might have been the centre of British fashion, its networks and processes operated in a different way to those elsewhere in the country. As described in chapter four, the austerity policies that benefitted manufacturers in cities such as Leeds and Manchester actively harmed London making. More significantly, the mixture of sources gathered through this research indicate that the geographies of London fashion were multiple and complex, and the meaning of exactly what

[4] See Humphreys, *Research on Display*.
[5] *Draper's Record*, 27 September 1947, 21.

constituted 'London fashion' was increasingly broad as a result of the outsourcing of manufacturing, licensing agreements of the kind between Peter Jones and the Couturiers Associés, and creative labelling from companies such as Marlbeck. At the same time, this period saw a concerted effort by many fashion businesses to exclude certain parts of the city from their fashionable narratives through careful marketing that concealed unfashionable addresses. More than ever before, fashion brands understood that in order to harness the symbolic power of the city, it was necessary to control the stories told about it.

Although this research has uncovered the power that fashion brands, retailers and the press exerted over the meaning of London fashion at this time of austerity, it also reveals how a myriad of other influences, from politicians to film actors and even next-door neighbours, shaped the city. Each chapter takes care to foreground the creative role that typically overlooked figures such as garment workers and retail staff played in reconstructing London fashion cultures after the disruption of the Second World War. This interest in individual experiences of London fashion is further developed by the archival encounters that punctuate the beginning and end of each chapter. These encounters clearly show the contribution that the small details of material objects have to make to building an in-depth understanding of how different people encountered austerity fashion. Furthermore, they remind us how museum collections provide material connections to past individuals, helping us see the unique skills and creative capabilities of the people who shaped these garments.

Redrawing the map of fashionable London raises questions about the city's creative relationship to other international fashion centres. While Parisian couture certainly did influence fashion in London, so did American ready-to-wear, and there is evidence to suggest that fashionable dissemination in austerity London was less a linear trickle-down process from haute couture to high street, and more a confusing, multi-directional web of circular influences incorporating bespoke makers, innovative ready-to-wear firms, costume designers and outworkers. Even home sewing played a part in this cocktail of international influences; although Butterick printed their paper patterns in England, the designs on them were imported from their American headquarters, and *Vogue*'s 'Paris Originals' paper patterns came complete with

Parisian designer labels for the sewer to stitch in to the creations they made out of London-bought fabric in their London homes.[6]

Unpicking this increasingly broad definition of what constitutes London fashion helps us see the immediate post-war period as one of contrasting fortunes for the city. On the one hand, it was clearly a period of deskilling and decline in London's fashionable making cultures. London fashion would never recover the breadth or depth of its pre-war high-end manufacturing capabilities, and this had ramifications for both the city's fashion industry and the individuals who worked within it. This process of deskilling, however, went hand-in-hand with the city's symbolic ascendance and the acquisition of new skills revolving around branding and merchandising. This project provides a reminder of the importance of telling the stories of both the winners and losers in order to understand how fashion cities are shaped. In having lost some of its status as a world-class centre of fashionable making, London was prompted to consider how it could challenge cities such as Paris using creative design and clever branding, fueling the development of institutions, such as the Royal College of Art's fashion course, that would prove to be significant to the city's future development.

Austerity and the rapid growth of ready-to-wear

The disruptions caused by war and post-war austerity in the 1940s are often considered in terms of time. The blitz is said to have caused Londoners' sense of time to fold back on itself, as the bombing forced the past into the present by exposing layers of London's buried history, revealing mounds of the Roman wall and the foundations of long-lost pre-fire buildings.[7] The pace of fashion was supposedly altered too, as trends changed more slowly from season to season.[8] Similarly, this research has found that the most significant impact of austerity on London fashion relates to the pace of fashionable change; however, alongside the slowing down of fashion cycles, it finds that austerity rapidly increased the speed of changes that were already occurring to the city's industry. As chapter four details, the city had

[6] Spanabel Emery, *A History of the Paper Pattern Industry*, 115, 166.
[7] Mellor, *Reading the Ruins*, 166. See also Karen Till's discussion of bomb-damaged Berlin in Till, *The New Berlin*, 66.
[8] Rationing and austerity slowed design changes both by encouraging manufacturers to produce longer runs of the same garments and by limiting the number of new items people could buy per season and encouraging people to wear clothes for longer. Howell, *Wartime Fashion*, 118.

experienced the beginnings of a restructuring away from widespread retail bespoke manufacture towards ready-to-wear in the inter-war period, but these changes were accelerated during the 1940s as a direct consequence of Utility orders and government policies, which encouraged large-scale mass-production in big factories. This move towards cheaper ready-to-wear fashions was also encouraged by post-war inflation in the prices of fashion goods, which was closely related to government decisions concerning taxation and monetary policy. At the same time, the government did little to assist the kinds of small-scale manufacturing that formed the bulk of London's garment industry. The fragmented, diverse and flexible nature of the city's fashionable makers was seen as backwards by many in government, for whom progress and modernity were linked to a streamlined ideal of Fordist mass-production.[9] Moreover, a broader cultural attitude that fashion was 'feminine'—and so frivolous—persisted, undermining the lobbying power of existing fashion makers. As fashion journalist Alison Settle presciently noted in an article in *Picture Post* in January 1945, London would not be able to fulfill its potential as a 'World Fashion Centre' until men in power started taking fashion seriously.[10]

While this acceleration of existing trends may not sound particularly dramatic, it had a significant impact on the trajectory of London fashion. London's fashion industry was used to adapting to change. The city had proved remarkably resilient in the face of social and technological advances for centuries, but the accelerated pace of 1940s change, in combination with the devastating physical damage that had been inflicted on the city's fashionable infrastructure during the war, proved a severe setback. London's garment manufacturers were not able to adapt fast enough to new processes, leading to a rapid increase in outsourcing to out-of-town factories in areas such as Yorkshire and South Wales and acting as a catalyst for a downward trend in London making. Although London was certainly not the only Western fashion city to experience a decline in its manufacturing in the latter half of the twentieth century, the body blow that austerity dealt to London was likely an important contributing factor in the nature of this decline; its role should be considered when examining how the balance between fashion makers, designers and brands in London today differs

[9] The failure to recognise the value of small scale models for fashion manufacture has been noted by both Nancy Green and John Styles. Green, *Ready-to-Wear and Ready to Work*, 4-6; Styles, 'Response', 34-35.
[10] 'London: Can it Become a World Fashion Centre?', *Picture Post*, 6 January 1945.

from other cities such as Paris or New York, and how this influences the way the fashion city operates.[11]

Further to this, the acceleration of changing manufacturing trends as a result of austerity had significant impacts on the way fashion was sold in London. Department stores were increasingly reliant on sales of branded ready-to-wear items, rather than made-to-measure garments, and found themselves struggling to distinguish themselves from competitors who stocked the same brands. At the same time, stores facing squeezed overheads and staff shortages welcomed the arrival of ready-to-wear in standardised sizing as it enabled them to move towards self-service style fashion departments. As chapter five explains, this resulted in retailers developing innovative new promotional techniques, particularly in the field of display and visual merchandising, which had taken on an increased importance thanks to austerity restrictions on paper usage for catalogues and mail-outs. More than ever before, London shops relied on the city's fashionable associations, rather than its actual material outputs, to sell clothes. Increasing numbers of shops began to include 'London', or the details of fashionable London postcodes and streets, on their advertising and clothes labels, and window displays and events were used to make connections among the city's history and culture, its high-end fashion industry, and the shops themselves.

Understanding the changing balance between different features of London fashion also provides an insight into the relative importance of menswear and womenswear in the city, and how this balance is shaped by a range of different factors. Although this project always intended to uncover the untold stories and contributions of London's predominantly female garment workers and shop assistants, it did not set out to look primarily at womenswear. The focus on how fashions were made and sold to women that subsequently emerged was driven by the archival materials available; it was no surprise to find that women's fashions tend to exist in museum collections in greater numbers, but the extent to which post-war advertising, promotion and retail activities were directed at women made it impossible to ignore the fact that the

[11] For example, New York's fashion industry is shaped by creative clusters of makers and designers, which facilitate the exchange of ideas and practices. This is something that London, with its relative absence of makers, does not enjoy to the same extent. Rantisi, 'The Ascendance of New York Fashion', 86-106.

most significant changes that happened to London fashion at this time were related to the making and selling of womenswear. As chapter five notes, this was partially the result of a prevailing cultural assumption that women were naturally more interested in consumption—and more susceptible to marketing—but this thesis demonstrates that it was also related to the different materialities of men's and women's fashions and the processes by which they were made. As chapter four discusses, the materiality of how women's clothes were designed and made were particularly effected by austerity conditions, and this contributed to the especially rapid changes experienced by London's womenswear industry in the 1940s and, in turn, to the developments made in the symbolic promotion of women's fashion in relation to the city.

Most significantly, tracing these connections between the decline in manufacturing and the growing importance of symbolism in London fashion demonstrates that the impacts of austerity in the immediate post-war period were not temporary or reversible, and there was no return to 'business as usual' in their aftermath. The rapid changes that occurred in the late 1940s were significant in London's transition from a place that made fashions to a more symbolic fashion city. This thesis argues that the shifts that occurred to London fashion, particularly relating to manufacture, in the late 1940s were highly significant for the trajectory of London fashion. As such, it suggests that this often overlooked period in London's fashion history deserves greater attention as a time when the foundations were laid for subsequent changes, in particular, the emergence of a new understanding of fashionable London in the 1960s and the city's growing global reputation in the 1980s.[12]

The impact of more-than-representational research processes

The key themes that have emerged through this research—most notably the wide-ranging impacts of changing manufacturing processes on the way fashion was promoted, sold and communicated in post-war London—provide a more comprehensive understanding of how London fashion was reconstructed following

[12] It also highlights the importance of surveying the different layers of the city's industry, from cheap ready-to-wear to high-end bespoke, in order to see the influences of the 1940s. One of the main reasons the changes preceding the developments in London fashion in the 1960s are overlooked is due to the narrow focus on couture fashions. See Walford, *Sixties Fashion*, 6.

the devastation of the Second World War. The diversity it found suggests a need to look again at the processes and networks of the fashion city in order to build a more cohesive and encompassing understanding of the relationship between London, austerity and fashion, and to consider how these may have subsequently shaped the city. These conclusions were shaped by incorporating a more-than-representational approach into researching this project. This approach brought together clothes, photographs, magazines, account books, official records and unofficial opinions from a range of archives and collections, and made space to consider how sources as different as the Board of Trade's *Census of Production* and a scribbled outline for a romance novel about garment workers, entitled 'One Night of Love in City Road', might both give insight into the changing relationship between fashion and the city. Looking for evidence of lived experience in sources changed the way I understood the relationship between materiality and images, revealing different perspectives on how fashion exerts influence through both its material and discursive forms. As chapter six shows, although the films produced by Ealing Studios do not provide a wholly accurate representation of how Londoners dressed in the late 1940s—the Londoners depicted by documentary photographers such as Bob Collins and Henry Grant show neither the extremes of material deprivation nor proliferation of new fashions seen in the films—it is possible to learn as much about the meaning of fashion at a time of austerity from where material and discursive sources differ as where they intersect.

Approaching research in this way demanded an openness to 'junk' materials, chance archival encounters and surprise finds that frequently frustrated the story this project was trying to piece together.[13] But by being open about what it was looking for, this research process also allowed room for speculation, diversity and doubt. This enabled alternative and contradictory stories to appear, which challenged a number of accepted orthodoxies of fashion history and demonstrate that more-than-representational approaches to the study of fashion history offer rich possibilities for the future of the discipline. Not only can they help us tell new stories about the nature and meanings of fashion in the past, but the 'cultural recycling' encouraged by this type of research process opens interdisciplinary connections that reveal the broader relevance of fashion to our understanding of the economic, social, political and cultural shape of cities such as London. For example, as chapter four demonstrates,

[13] Lorimer, 'Caught in the Nick of Time', 259-260.

by including fragments of garment workers' stories and using these to make connections between processes of design, production and various forms of consumption, this thesis both sheds light on historical London fashion and encourages us to see the city's current fashion systems differently.

Many of these insights emerged from interactions with objects or archival materials that spoke of individual experiences. Often, these were fleeting encounters with people long forgotten—partially glimpsed through a garment's stitching or complaints made to a trade union official—but taking a more-than-representational approach to this research made space to consider how the surviving fragments of their different stories might shift the narrative of austerity fashion. As chapter three discusses, much of our understanding of the impact of fashion trends or the significance of certain designers in the 1940s was documented and disseminated by a small number of individuals, whose wealth or position in the fashion industry gave their voices authority and access to publishing outlets, enabling their thoughts to be recorded for future fashion scholars to study. Taking a more-than-representational approach enabled this project to listen for quieter voices, recorded via different mediums. The variety of these that emerged from the archives quickly made it apparent that there was no single, unifying austerity experience. Rather, it suggests that the way people understood austerity fashion was highly subjective—shaped by cultural narratives, material interactions with garments, and the role fashion played as a tool with which people negotiated their changed circumstances and prospects.

The subjective nature of austerity fashion is particularly apparent in the diaries collected by Mass observation, which reveal that, at the very same time that some Londoners were looking at surrealist-inspired window displays in the West End, others were detailing the volume of outstanding mending they had yet to complete in their diaries.[14] The diversity of experiences recorded by Mass Observation demonstrates how individual understandings of austerity and its relationship to fashion were constructed along lines of class, gender and place. But they also demonstrate the strong influence of exposure to prevailing cultural narratives. This is especially noticeable in the uniformity of Mass Observation respondents' tripartite

[14] One particular female diarist from Morden provided regular updates on her 'outstanding' mending jobs, including such laborious tasks as reconstructing 'sheets side-to-middle', to replace worn fabric in the centre with the less worn at the edges. Diary for 11 June 1949. Mass Observation, Diarist 5474.

focus on shortages, prices and mending in their diaries, in spite of their wide variety of socio-economic backgrounds, political views, and material realities of their day-to-day existence. Looking at the range of colours, designs and marks of wear visible in extant garments suggests that many Londoners derived pleasure from the way they dressed, whereas Mass Observation respondents commonly take an apologetic tone when discussing clothing, as if ashamed of the supposed frivolity of fashion during a time of economic difficulty and serious social change.[15] This sense of shame at finding pleasure in appearance seems to be particularly acute in women, some of whom actively struggle against their relationship to clothing, suppressing and denying fashionable urges in a way that was undoubtedly shaped by political discourses that framed self-denial as a moral position.[16] As one female diarist explained, everyday life during a time of austerity was no place for such insubstantial matter as fashion: 'I wore my new outfit of smart black jacket and black-and-white skirt. I looked very nice but realised vividly that the only time clothes matter is when there is nothing worthy of interest'.[17]

Taking a more-than-representational approach to researching this topic means that sources such as Mass Observation are not discredited for their subjectivity. Making space for differing voices means we do not have to pick any one of these individual narratives as the 'correct' understanding of history, but instead can recognise coexistent but separate realities in each of these stories. Crucially, this makes space to incorporate narratives that lie outside the bounds of official histories.[18] As Doreen Massey argues in *For Space*, place can be considered in terms of interrelating narratives, as 'a simultaneity of stories-so-far', and as such its character 'will be a product of these intersections within that wider setting, and of what is made of

[15]This is particularly apparent in the way many Mass Observation diarists are careful to highlight that any clothes shopping is undertaken as a result of need, rather than desire, and often frame the activity in terms of a tiresome quest. Diary for 19 October 1948. Mass Observation, Diarist 5474. See also diarist who 'exhausted Clapham' in her attempts to find a practical blue suit. Diary for May 1945. Mass Observation, Diarist 5275. And diarist who complained of lack of desired quality when shopping. Diary for September 1948. Mass Observation, Diarist 5103.

[16] Objects that would have once brought pleasure were suddenly out of place—if not actively shameful—in this changed post-war world. Navigating austerity required learning new social codes, as one diarist learned the hard way after getting dressed up for a night out only to find herself feeling deeply uncomfortable and 'overdressed' wearing a sable cape inherited from her Grandmother to the Fitzroy Tavern. This woman subsequently seems to have learned to restrict her enjoyment of dress to praise for the theatrical costumes she observed on stage and screen. Diary for June 1947. Mass Observation, Diarist 5250.

[17] Diary for 3 May 1949. Mass Observation, Diarist 5474.

[18] Samuel, *Theatres of Memory*, 8.

them.'[19] The scale and complexity of cities makes a collection of narratives—akin to an anthology of short stories—a particularly appealing way of understanding them as it makes space for the different experiences of their inhabitants.[20]

Although these multiple narratives are different and often contradictory, this thesis considers whether they can be understood through something akin to Raymond Williams's idea of 'structures of feeling'—the concept that a common set of values and perceptions can be seen in the various cultural activities of a particular time or place.[21] It also places a value on exposing the hidden work that goes into 'making' narratives of the city and the power structures that lie behind this.[22] Acknowledging this labour helps us to see how the existing orthodoxies and mythologies of austerity fashion have been constructed and the range of mechanisms through which they came about. Some of these narratives can be traced back to the physical material through which austerity fashion has subsequently been understood—for example, the numerous examples of bright-coloured fabrics in the Museum of London's collections suggest that overwhelmingly dark, muted tones with which the period is associated stem from the way it is commonly seen today through black and white photography and film. Other narratives point to more purposeful exercises of power. Businesses whose success relied on their fashionable reputations furthered their interests by concealing practices of outsourcing or promoting their clothing by advertising the address of their West End headquarters rather than the locations of their factories. Both the Labour and Conservative parties used clothing to narrate their alternative visions for post-war Britain, drawing on the ability of fashion to viscerally communicate belief structures and desires. Considering the various ways fashion was co-opted by different groups gives a powerful insight into not just whose voices have been forgotten, but why their experiences were suppressed and who benefitted from this.

Unravelling the power structures that profited from the historical orthodoxies of austerity fashion is not just important for our understanding of London fashion in the 1940s, but also for the way we understand how austerity has continued to shape

[19] Massey, *For Space*, 130.
[20] As exemplified by Italo Calvino's novel *Invisible Cities*, in which he tells the stories of 55 apparently different and fictitious cities in order to describe the single city of Venice.
[21] Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 128-135.
[22] Pile, *Real Cities*, 57.

society. The historical periodisation that confines austerity between the years of 1945 and 1951 frames austerity as something that ended, rather than a lingering presence that shaped people's lives in an ongoing way. It turns 'austerity' films such as *Passport to Pimlico* into nostalgic tales of community spirit, overlooking the real sense of anger, frustrated ambition and blighted opportunity present in the film. The mythologies of fashion during this period similarly rely on a relational construction that pits drab austerity against the glamour of new fashions, setting up 1947 as a year that freed the public from their struggles against post-war austerity. Looking across different sources encourages us to reconsider these representational narratives of austerity as something that was overcome. It demands we look again at how understandings of austerity have echoed through time and how the power structures that formed them are perpetuated by their presence in the contemporary cultural dialogues—fed by books and museum displays—that shape our sense of national understating today.

Towards more-than-representational museum displays

Working collaboratively with the Museum of London encouraged consideration of how this research might offer a starting point from which to consider how museums might tell different types of austerity stories capable of challenging the dominant cultural narrative about this period.[23] Museum collections, particularly those held by institutions with a social history remit such as the Museum of London, contain material evidence that helps to explain the development of societies, cultures and the individuals who exist within them. However, the way these items are publicly displayed commonly emphasises broad historical narratives over individual experiences, using objects to exemplify rather than challenge existing historical interpretations. Using objects as representative tools to make history more easily comprehensible risks reducing museums to 'showcases for the popular narratives that used to be reserved for books or movies'.[24] Prescriptive representational displays threaten the role of the museum as a space for exploring the past because they shut down the opportunity for visitors to personally engage with the materiality of objects in a way that opens up space for speculation and alternative viewpoints. Although the simplicity and certainty of representational displays might seem attractive to some

[23] Bide, 'Signs of Wear'.
[24] Miller, 'A New Republic of Letters', 7.

visitors, it alienates others by excluding memories of divergent experiences that destabilise established narratives.

Moreover, representational displays can lead to a narrowing pool of first- and second-hand memories. Museum displays have the power to shape the stories we tell about ourselves, as the making of personal memories is a life-long, ongoing process, in which memories are constantly reconstituted and created by exposure to changing cultural narratives, including those encountered in museums.[25] Representative displays predominantly appeal to a sense of collective memory, making the museum a site in which visitors can confirm their place in history by validating particular sets of memories that fit the dominant narrative.[26] This can only be achieved by excluding individual experiences that do not fit. In this way, personal memories can be mediated and altered through the representation of shared memories in museum displays, and the museum risks colluding in a process of collective forgetting.[27]

Incorporating more biographical details about the people who shaped these objects into the stories told about them has the power to illuminate the relationships between people, places and things.[28] Moreover, such biographical details need not be limited to recorded information about wearers and makers; information about the people who designed, made, sold, wore and mended these garments can be glimpsed in their stitches and their marks of wear. Drawing out individual voices exposes a diversity of experiences that disrupt historical orthodoxies, preventing them from being reconstituted in the form of a cosy cultural nostalgia that promotes a deeply socially conservative ideal of domestic womanhood and reinforces a social order that empowers an elite.[29] Museums can play an important role in retelling history by experimenting with alternative display methodologies that open up the stories they tell about objects in order to incorporate multiple narratives, with a focus on integrating disruptive objects into fashion displays.

Due to their ability to tell personal and social stories simultaneously, clothes represent an opportunity for museums to experiment with display methodologies

[25] Hirsch, *Family Frames*, 249; Tarlo, 'Islamic Cosmopolitanism', 145.
[26] Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country*, 191; Misztal, *Theories of Social Remembering*, 10-16.
[27] See Hirsch, *Family Frames*; Liss, *Trespassing Through Shadows.*
[28] See Hill, *Museums and Biographies.*
[29] See Bramall, *The Cultural Politics of Austerity*; Hatherly, *The Ministry of Nostalgia*.

that encourage a process of co-authorship between the institution and individual visitor. Drawing on theories of multidirectional memory, it is possible to break the hierarchy that privileges museum narrative over personal memory, especially in the display of fashions from recent history. Contextual information included in displays (such as images and written accounts) need not tell the same story as the clothes they sit alongside. These sources are not in competition with each other, but engaged in an ongoing process of negotiation, building upon each other and exploring both their differences and similarities rather than fighting for supremacy.[30] This presents an opportunity to make space for visitor memories within displays, allowing visitors to engage with the materiality of objects through their own personal histories and cultural understanding in a way that is both inclusive and historically informative.

Museums have long recognised the value of using visitor memories to illuminate collections through activities such as reminiscence activities, but these memories are usually utilised as supplementary information to objects, not displayed alongside or in dialogue with them.[31] Using the memories of multiple individuals to speak to a single fashion object can illuminate its complex social and cultural meanings; borrowing from the methodology of memory-work, museums should invite visitors to contribute knowledge and respond to objects in a way that actively incorporates personal responses into displays.[32] Such methodologies prompt a dialogue that has the potential to explore the tiny details of material memory by removing the barriers separating the visitor's knowledge from the information contained within the collection.[33] This is an empowering process due to the role that remembering and reconstructing the past plays in the formation of identities, and it highlights the power that we, as individuals, have to change and shape society.[34] Finally, museums should consider display methodologies that enable visitors to engage with the materiality of a range of objects that tell different stories. Too often, objects that do not quite fit

[30] Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, 3.
[31] Pye, 'Introduction: The Power of Touch', 20.
[32] In 2004, curator Deirdre Murphy used the memories of multiple individuals to speak to a single dress in an exhibition at Kensington Palace, entitled 'French Connections: Memories of Her Majesty the Queen in Paris'. In this exhibition, Murphy introduced the dress through its impact on different individuals, from one of the embroiderers who crafted it to an usher at the event to which it was worn, creating a fuller understanding of the dress and its various social and cultural meanings. Further to this, social media provides a potential means for visitors to upload stories and images that can be displayed in the gallery, changing the narrative position of the display by providing a stream of new contextual information.
[33] Crawford, Kippax, Onyx, Gault and Benton, *Emotion and Gender*, 41.
[34] See Onyx and Small, 'Memory-Work: The Method'.

prevailing historical tropes are left in the storeroom and not made available for public view. In order to display these more unusual objects, museums might consider incorporating different types of knowledge into exhibition labels.[35]

Once on display, museums should then consider how visitors could engage with the materiality of these objects. Close observation of fashion objects is a hugely rewarding task, but one usually reserved for individual researchers. It provides intimate and experiential access to history and allows us to interrogate our understanding of the past by asking sensory questions, exploring both what a garment was for and what it may have felt like to wear. The experience of close observation is often difficult to define or translate into museum display labels, but technology offers increasing opportunities for visitors to partake in experiential looking through video and virtual reality, enabling them to explore the rips and seams of objects that they cannot touch or scrutinise at close proximity for conservation or curatorial reasons.[36] By moving away from presenting linear narratives and opening up multiple ways of interacting with the materiality of collections, these display methodologies might create a space in which visitors can encounter some of the different insights, meanings and emotions contained within the objects, and use these to build an understanding of how these stories from the past relate to their present. Moreover, by encouraging visitors to share their different understandings, these collaborative methods bring diversity to existing fashion collections.

Taking a more-than-representational approach to the research and presentation of fashion histories in this project demonstrates why austerity fashion still matters, and it is important that future museum displays consider how experiencing history in the ways set out here offers visitors opportunities to explore how the past and present resonate.[37] One of the more surprising outcomes of this research was the personal

[35] For example, objects could be labelled with date ranges that detail the duration of time a piece was worn rather than its date of production, and labels might even discuss aspects of a garment's story that remain uncertain or unknown. The Museum of London has experimented with this in the temporary displays in their 'Show Space' gallery, and is actively considering how uncertainty and curatorial research processes could be incorporated into displays in their new museum building: Curator's Workshop Presentation, Museum of London, 16 March 2016.

[36] A number of institutions have started to experiment with the use of video to present 'curator's eye views' of collection objects, for example the Metropolitan Museum of Art's '82nd & Fifth' project. At the Museum of London, fashion curator Timothy Long has been giving members of the public 'behind the scenes' glimpses of items in the store through short videos uploaded to Twitter.

[37] Patchett, 'The taxidermist's apprentice', 1-19.

insight it offered into the lingering echoes of austerity in contemporary life. Studying the austerity policies and practices of the 1940s, it became apparent that these had shaped my own understanding of fashion through collective memories inherited and absorbed from family members and cultural sources. Understanding how austerity echoes down through generations in this way is particularly relevant with the passing of time; as the last generation to remember this era enters old age, it is important we take the opportunity to understand how their memories and experiences have shaped our own.

Moreover, taking materiality as a central theme encouraged this research to look differently at representational sources and, in doing so, found that materiality does not just disappear when the material object ceases to exist, but material experiences can be recovered from sources such as film and photographs. Considering how the materiality of various objects can bring experiences of the past into the present demonstrates how material and remembered traces of austerity still haunt contemporary London. More broadly, this project serves as a reminder of the importance of accommodating the ghosts contained within the materiality of extant sources so that we might begin to make sense of how the intergenerational echoes and emotional inheritances of the past continue to shape the present.[38]

[38] Till, *The New Berlin*, 16; Pile, Real Cities, 160.

Figure 162:

Animal market on Club Row, 1948. Bob Collins, Museum of London, IN37824.

Figure 163:

Hammersmith pub on Boat Race day, 1952. Nigel Henderson, Museum of London, IN7526.

Archival encounter no. 8:

67.108/2: Skirt and jacket in red and white spots c.1949-1950

Figure 163:

Cream cotton jacket and pleated rayon skirt with red dots. Museum of London, 67.108/2.

It is May 2016, and I am aiding a curator in dressing mannequins ahead of a photography session. This activity requires careful consideration of how each garment is constructed, because the structure of the tailoring, the stiffness of any padding, the shape of the openings and the amount of stretch in the fabric all contribute to the level of ease with which garments can be maneuvered over the stiff limbs and torsos of the mannequins without damaging them. It soon becomes apparent that, as a general rule, it is easier to dress items of inexpensive 1940s ready-to-wear than more highly tailored (and often more expensive) items. The skirt and jacket that make up item 67.108/2 fall into the first category—they are lightweight, unlined and extremely malleable.

Although they were acquisitioned from a donor who wore them together as a suit, close inspection reveals that it is unlikely this skirt and jacket were originally made as a pair. The pattern of their fabrics may be virtually identical, but one is cotton and the other rayon. Furthermore, differences in stitching implies that they were made in separate factories with different types of machines. Both items, however, were made fast and with maximum efficiency. The patterns are cut to require the least amount of construction possible—for example, the jacket has a shawl collar, constructed from an extension of the fabric at the garment front, and the seams have been finished using overlocking machines. Whether she obtained the items separately or as a pair, the way the donor combined these two pieces to make an inexpensive yet stylish outfit is a reminder of the democratic possibilities offered by the new ready-to-wear processes that emerged out of post-war austerity and how, for all their broad impacts on the city's businesses, they also afforded ordinary Londoners greater opportunities to cultivate their own individual fashionable tastes.

Figure 164:

Inside detail of ream cotton jacket with red dots, showing use of overlocking machine to finish seams. Museum of London, 67.108/2.

Figure 165:

'Lovely Lady model' dress by Peggy Page advert. *Draper's Record*, 8 May 1948, 27.

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